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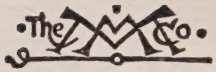

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TORONTO

From a charcoal drawing by John S. Sargent, R.A.

PLAYS
AND
CONTROVERSIES

BY
W. B. YEATS

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1924

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New and Revised Edition.
Set up and electrotyped. Published August, 1924.

Printed in the United States of America

PREFACE

I HAVE gathered into this book two plays, written before the foundation of the Irish Theatre though much corrected since, and four plays written but the other day and intended for performance in drawing-room and studio, and a long series of dramatic notes. I begin the book with these notes, which are taken for the most part from an occasional publication called *Samhain,* started in the third year of 'The Irish Dramatic Movement' to defend that movement, and long out of print. In a little while Dail Eireann and our Dublin newspapers will consider, as I hope, the foundation of an Irish State Theatre; and I would put these old notes into evidence. Though often about foolish quarrels, or plays but little better, they may keep their use even when that occasion passes; being passionately written, and at a moment when Ireland was preparing, in that dark portion of the mind which is like the other side of the moon, for insurrection and anarchic violence; and all in some measure a plea for intellectual sponta-

neity against unyielding, mechanical, abstract principles. I ask indulgence if I overrate their value, for it may be that I cannot judge sentences that call up memories of the time when I was most alive, having most friends and enemies. All needful explanations are in Lady Gregory's book, *Our Irish Theatre*.

The plays are so abundantly annotated and prefaced that I need say nothing more except that the first was planned and partly written when I was little more than a boy, and that it gives me more pleasure in the memory than any of my plays. It was all thought out in the first fervour of my generation's distaste for Victorian rhetoric; that rhetoric once away, every poetical virtue seemed possible.

W. B. YEATS.

DUBLIN,
February 1923

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THE IRISH DRAMATIC MOVEMENT

SAMHAIN: 1901

When Lady Gregory, Mr. Edward Martyn, and myself planned the Irish Literary Theatre, we decided that it should be carried on in the form we had projected for three years. We thought that three years would show whether the country desired to take up the project, and make it a part of the national life, and that we, at any rate, could return to our proper work, in which we did not include theatrical management, at the end of that time. A little later, Mr. George Moore[1] joined us; and, looking back now upon our work, I doubt if it could have been done at all without his knowledge of the stage; and certainly if the performances of this present year bring our adventure to a successful close, a chief part of the credit will be his. Many, however, have helped us in various degrees, for in Ireland just now one has only to discover an idea that seems

[1] Both Mr. Moore and Mr. Martyn dropped out of the movement after the third performance at the Irish Literary Theatre in 1901.—W. B. Y., 1908.

of service to the country for friends and helpers to start up on every hand. While we needed guarantors we had them in plenty, and though Mr. Edward Martyn's public spirit made it unnecessary to call upon them, we thank them none the less.

Whether the Irish Literary Theatre has a successor made on its own model or not, we can claim that a dramatic movement which will not die has been started. When we began our work, we tried in vain to get a play in Gaelic. We could not even get a condensed version of the dialogue of Oisin and Patrick. We wrote to Gaelic enthusiasts in vain, for their imagination had not yet turned towards the stage, and now there are excellent Gaelic plays by Dr. Douglas Hyde, by Father O'Leary, by Father Dineen, and by Mr. MacGinlay; and the Gaelic League has had a competition for a one-act play in Gaelic, with what results I do not know. There have been successful performances of plays in Gaelic at Dublin and at Macroom, and at Letterkenny, and I think at other places; and Mr. Fay has got together an excellent little company which plays both in Gaelic and in English. I may say, for I am perhaps writing an epitaph, and epitaphs should be written in a genial spirit, that we have turned a great deal of Irish imagination towards the stage. We could not have done

this if our movement had not opened a way of expression for an impulse that was in the people themselves. The truth is that the Irish people are at that precise stage of their history when imagination, shaped by many stirring events, desires dramatic expression. One has only to listen to a recitation of Raftery's *Argument with Death* at some country Feis to understand this. When Death makes a good point, or Raftery a good point, the audience applaud delightedly, and applaud, not as a London audience would, some verbal dexterity, some piece of smartness, but the movements of a simple and fundamental comedy. One sees it too in the reciters themselves, whose acting is at times all but perfect in its vivid simplicity. I heard a little Claddagh girl tell a folk-story at Galway Feis with a restraint and a delightful energy that could hardly have been bettered by the most careful training.

The organisation of this movement is of immediate importance. Some of our friends propose that somebody begin at once to get a small stock company together, and that he invite, let us say, Mr. Benson, to find us certain well-trained actors, Irish if possible, but well trained of a certainty, who will train our actors, and take the more difficult parts at the beginning. These friends contend

that it is necessary to import our experts at the beginning, for our company must be able to compete with travelling English companies, but that a few years will be enough to make many competent Irish actors. The Corporation of Dublin should be asked, they say, to give a small annual sum of money, such as they give to the Academy of Music; and the Corporations of Cork and Limerick and Waterford, and other provincial towns, to give small endowments in the shape of a hall and attendants and lighting for a week or two out of every year; and the Technical Board to give a small annual sum of money to a school of acting which would teach fencing and declamation, and gesture and the like. The stock company would perform in Dublin perhaps three weeks in spring, and three weeks in autumn, and go on tour the rest of the time through Ireland, and through the English towns where there is a large Irish population. It would perform plays in Irish and English, and also, it is proposed, the masterpieces of the world, making a point of performing Spanish, and Scandinavian, and French, and perhaps Greek masterpieces rather more than Shakespeare, for Shakespeare is seen, not well done indeed, but not unendurably ill done, in the Theatre of Commerce. It would do its best to give Ireland

a hardy and shapely national character by opening the doors to the four winds of the world, instead of leaving the door that is towards the east wind open alone. Certainly, the national character, which is so essentially different from the English that Spanish and French influences may well be most healthy, is at present like one of those miserable thorn bushes by the sea that are all twisted to one side by some prevailing wind.

It is contended that there is no reason why the company should not be as successful as similar companies in Germany and Scandinavia, and that it would be even of commercial advantage to Dublin by making it a pleasanter place to live in, besides doing incalculable good to the whole intellect of the country. One, at any rate, of those who press the project on us has much practical knowledge of the stage and of theatrical management, and knows what is possible and what is not possible.

Others among our friends, and among these are some who have had more than their share of the hard work which has built up the intellectual movement in Ireland, argue that a theatre of this kind would require too much money to be free, that it

could not touch on politics, the most vital passion and vital interest of the country, as they say, and that the attitude of continual compromise between conviction and interest, which it would necessitate, would become demoralising to everybody concerned, especially at moments of political excitement. They tell us that the war between an Irish Ireland and an English Ireland is about to become much fiercer, to divide families and friends it may be, and that the organisations that will lead in the war must be able to say everything the people are thinking. They would have Irishmen give their plays to a company like Mr. Fay's, when they are within its power, and if not, to Mr. Benson or to any other travelling company which will play them in Ireland without committees, where everybody compromises a little. In this way, they contend, we would soon build up an Irish theatre from the ground, escaping to some extent the conventions of the ordinary theatre, and those English voices which give a foreign air to our words. And though we might have to wait some years, we would get even the masterpieces of the world in good time. Let us, they think, be poor enough to whistle at the thief who would take away some of our thoughts, and after Mr. Fay has taken his company, as he plans, through the villages and the country towns,

he will get the little endowment that is necessary, or if he does not, some other will.

I do not know what Lady Gregory or Mr. Moore thinks of these projects. I am not going to say what I think. I have spent much of my time and more of my thought these last ten years on Irish organisation, and now that the Irish Literary Theatre has completed the plan I had in my head ten years ago, I want to go down again to primary ideas. I want to put old stories into verse, and if I put them into dramatic verse it will matter less to me henceforward who plays them than what they play, and how they play. I hope to get our heroic age into verse, and to solve some problems of the speaking of verse to musical notes.

There is only one question which is raised by the two projects I have described on which I will give an opinion. It is of the first importance that those among us who want to write for the stage should study the dramatic masterpieces of the world. If they can get them on the stage, so much the better, but study them they must if Irish drama is to mean anything to Irish intellect. At the present moment, Shakespeare being the only great dramatist known to Irish writers has made them cast their work too much on

the English model. Miss Milligan's *Red Hugh,* which was successfully acted in Dublin the other day, had no business to be in two scenes; and Father O'Leary's *Tadg Saor,* despite its most vivid and picturesque, though far too rambling dialogue, shows in its half-dozen changes of scene the influence of the same English convention, which arose when there was no scene-painting, and is often a difficulty where there is, and is always an absurdity in a farce of thirty minutes, breaking up the emotion and sending our thoughts here and there. Mr. MacGinlay's *Elis agus an bhean deirce* has not this defect, and though I had not Irish enough to follow it when I saw it played, and excellently played, by Mr. Fay's company, I could see from the continual laughter of the audience that it held them with an unbroken emotion. The best Gaelic play after Dr. Hyde's is, I think, Father Dineen's *Creideamh agus Gorta,* and though it changes the scene a little oftener than is desirable under modern conditions, it does not remind me of an English model. It reminds me of Calderon by its treatment of a religious subject, and by something in Father Dineen's sympathy with the people that is like his. But I think if Father Dineen had studied that great Catholic dramatist he would not have failed, as he has done once

or twice, to remember some necessary detail of a situation. In the first scene he makes a servant ask his fellow-servants about things he must have known as well as they; and he loses a dramatic moment in his third scene by forgetting that Seagan Gorm has a pocketful of money which he would certainly, being the man he was, have offered to the woman he was urging into temptation. The play towards the end changes from prose to verse, and the reverence and simplicity of the verse makes one think of a mediæval miracle play. The subject has been so much a part of Irish life that it was bound to be used by an Irish dramatist, though certainly I shall always prefer plays which attack a more eternal devil than the proselytiser. He has been defeated, and the arts are at their best when they are busy with battles that can never be won. It is possible, however, that we may have to deal with passing issues until we have re-created the imaginative tradition of Ireland, and filled the popular imagination again with saints and heroes. These short plays (though they would be better if their writers knew the masters of their craft) are very dramatic as they are, but there is no chance of our writers of Gaelic, or our writers of English, doing good plays of any length if they do not study the mas-

ters. If Irish dramatists had studied the romantic plays of Ibsen, the one great master the modern stage has produced, they would not have sent the Irish Literary Theatre imitations of Boucicault, who had no relation to literature, and Father O'Leary would have put his gift for dialogue, a gift certainly greater than, let us say, Mr. Jones' or Mr. Grundy's, to better use than the writing of that long, rambling dramatisation of the *Tain bo Cuailgne,* in which I hear in the midst of the exuberant Gaelic dialogue the worn-out conventions of English poetic drama. The moment we leave even a little the folk-tradition of the peasant, as we must in drama, if we do not know the best that has been said and written in the world, we do not even know ourselves. It is no great labour to know the best dramatic literature, for there is very little of it. We Irish must know it all, for we have, I think, far greater need of the severe discipline of French and Scandinavian drama than of Shakespeare's luxuriance.

If the *Diarmuid and Grania* and the *Casadh an t-Sugain* are not well constructed, it is not because Mr. Moore and Dr. Hyde and myself do not understand the importance of construction, and Mr. Martyn has shown by the triumphant construction of *The*

Heather Field how much thought he has given to the matter; but for the most part our Irish plays read as if they were made without a plan, without a 'scenario,' as it is called. European drama began so, but the European drama had centuries for its growth, while our art must grow to perfection in a generation or two if it is not to be smothered before it is well above the earth by what is merely commercial in the art of England.

Let us learn construction from the masters, and dialogue from ourselves. A relation of mine has just written me a letter, in which he says: 'It is natural to an Irishman to write plays; he has an inborn love of dialogue and sound about him, of a dialogue as lively, gallant, and passionate as in the times of great Eliza. In these days an Englishman's dialogue is that of an amateur—that is to say, it is never spontaneous. I mean in *real life*. Compare it with an Irishman's, above all a poor Irishman's, reckless abandonment and naturalness, or compare it with the only fragment that has come down to us of Shakespeare's own conversation.' (He is remembering a passage in, I think, Ben Jonson's *Underwoods*.) 'Petty commerce and puritanism have brought to the front the wrong type of Englishman; the lively,

joyous, yet tenacious man has transferred himself to Ireland. We have him and we will keep him unless the combined nonsense of . . . and . . . and . . . succeed in suffocating him.'

In Dublin the other day I saw a poster advertising a play by a Miss . . . under the patronage of certain titled people. I had little hope of finding any reality in it, but I sat out two acts. Its dialogue was above the average, though the characters were the old rattle-traps of the stage, the wild Irish girl, and the Irish servant, and the bowing Frenchman, and the situations had all been squeezed dry generations ago. One saw everywhere the shadowy mind of a woman of the Irish upper classes as they have become to-day, but under it all there was a kind of life, though it was but the life of a string and a wire. I do not know who Miss . . . is, but I know that she is young, for I saw her portrait in a weekly paper, and I think that she is clever enough to make her work of some importance. If she goes on doing bad work she will make money, perhaps a great deal of money, but she will do a little harm to her country. If, on the other hand, she gets into an original relation with life, she will, perhaps, make no money, and she will certainly have her class against her.

The Irish upper classes put everything into a money measure. When any one among them begins to write or paint they ask him, 'How much money have you made?' 'Will it pay?' Or they say, 'If you do this or that you will make more money.' The poor Irish clerk or shopboy,[1] who writes verses or articles in his brief leisure, writes for the glory of God and of his country; and because his motive is high, there is not one vulgar thought in the countless little ballad books that have been written from Callinan's day to this. They are often clumsily written, for they are in English, and if you have not read a great deal, it is difficult to write well in a language which has been long separated from the 'folk-speech'; but they have not a thought a proud and simple man would not have written. The writers were poor men, but they left that money measure to the Irish upper classes. All Irish writers have to choose whether they will write as the upper classes have done, not to express but to exploit this country; or join the intellectual movement which has raised the cry that was heard in Russia in the seventies, the cry, 'To the people.'

[1] That mood has gone, with Fenianism and its wild hopes. The National movement has been commercialised in the last few years. How much real ideality is but hidden for a time one cannot say.—W. B. Y., March 1908.

Moses was little good to his people until he had killed an Egyptian; and for the most part a writer or public man of the upper classes is useless to this country till he has done something that separates him from his class. We wish to grow peaceful crops, but we must dig our furrows with the sword.

Our plays this year will be produced by Mr. Benson at the Gaiety Theatre on October the 21st, and on some of the succeeding days. They are Dr. Douglas Hyde's *Casadh an t-Sugain,* which is founded on a well-known Irish story of a wandering poet; and *Diarmuid and Grania,* a play in three acts and in prose by Mr. George Moore and myself, which is founded on the most famous of all Irish stories, the story of the lovers whose beds were the cromlechs. The first act of *Diarmuid and Grania* is in the great banqueting hall of Tara, and the second and third are on the slopes of Ben Bulben in Sligo. We do not think there is anything in either play to offend anybody, but we make no promises. We thought our plays inoffensive last year and the year before, but we were accused the one year of sedition, and the other of heresy.

I have called this little collection of writ-

ings *Samhain,* the old name for the beginning of winter, because our plays this year are in October, and because our Theatre is coming to an end in its present shape.

1902

THE Irish Literary Theatre wound up its three years of experiment last October with *Diarmuid and Grania,* which was played by Mr. Benson's Company, Mr. Benson himself playing Diarmuid with poetry and fervour, and *Casadh an t-Sugain,* played by Dr. Hyde and some members of the Gaelic League. *Diarmuid and Grania* drew large audiences, but its version of the legend was a good deal blamed by critics, who knew only the modern text of the story. There are two versions, and the play was fully justified by Irish and Scottish folk-lore, and by certain early Irish texts, which do not see Grania through very friendly eyes. Any critic who is interested in so dead a controversy can look at the folk-tales quoted by Campbell in, I think, *West Highland Superstitions,* and at the fragment translated by Kuno Meyer, at page 458, of vol. i. of *Zeitschrift für Keltische Philologie.* Dr. Hyde's play, on the other hand, pleased everybody, and has been played a good many

times in a good many places since. It was the first play in Irish played in a theatre, and did much towards making plays a necessary part in Irish propaganda.

The Irish Literary Theatre has given place to a company of Irish actors. Its Committee saw them take up the work all the more gladly because it had not formed them or influenced them. A dramatic society with guarantors and patrons can never have more than a passing use, because it can never be quite free; and it is not successful until it is able to say it is no longer wanted. Amateur actors will perform for *Cumann-na-Gael* plays chosen by themselves, and written by A. E., by Mr. Cousins, by Mr. Ryan, by Mr. MacGinlay, and by myself. These plays will be given at the Antient Concert Rooms at the end of October, but the National Theatrical Company will repeat their successes with new work in a very little hall they have hired in Camden Street. If they could afford it they would have hired some bigger house, but, after all, M. Antoine founded his *Théâtre Libre* with a company of amateurs in a hall that only held three hundred people.

The first work of theirs to get much attention was their performance, last spring, at the invitation of *Inghinidhe h-Eireann,* of

A. E.'s *Deirdre,* and my *Cathleen ni Houlihan.* They had Miss Maud Gonne's help, and it was a fine thing for so beautiful a woman to consent to play my poor old Cathleen, and she played with nobility and tragic power. She showed herself as good in tragedy as Dr. Hyde is in comedy, and stirred a large audience very greatly. The whole company played well, too, but it was in *Deirdre* that they interested me most. They showed plenty of inexperience, especially in the minor characters, but it was the first performance I had seen since I understood these things in which the actors kept still enough to give poetical writing its full effect upon the stage. I had imagined such acting, though I had not seen it, and had once asked a dramatic company to let me rehearse them in barrels that they might forget gesture and have their minds free to think of speech for a while. The barrels, I thought, might be on castors, so that I could shove them about with a pole when the action required it. The other day I saw Sara Bernhardt and De Max in *Phèdre,* and understood where Mr. Fay, who stage-manages the National Theatrical Company, had gone for his model.[1] For long periods the

[1] An illusion, as he himself explained to me. He had never seen *Phèdre.* The players were quiet and natural, because they did not know what else to do. They had not learned to go wrong.—W. B. Y., March 1908.

performers would merely stand and pose, and I once counted twenty-seven quite slowly before anybody on a fairly well-filled stage moved, as it seemed, so much as an eyelash. The periods of stillness were generally shorter, but I frequently counted seventeen, eighteen, or twenty before there was a movement. I noticed, too, that the gestures had a rhythmic progression. Sara Bernhardt would keep her hands clasped over, let us say, her right breast for some time, and then move them to the other side, perhaps, lowering her chin till it touched her hands, and then, after another long stillness, she would unclasp them and hold one out, and so on, not lowering them till she had exhausted all the gestures of uplifted hands. Through one long scene De Max, who was quite as fine, never lifted his hand above his elbow, and it was only when the emotion came to its climax that he raised it to his breast. Beyond them stood a crowd of white-robed men who never moved at all, and the whole scene had the nobility of Greek sculpture, and an extraordinary reality and intensity. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen upon the stage, and made me understand, in a new way, that saying of Goethe's which is understood everywhere but in England, 'Art is art because it is not nature.' Of course, our amateurs were poor and crude

beside those great actors, perhaps the greatest in Europe, but they followed them as well as they could, and got an audience of artisans, for the most part, to admire them for doing it. I heard somebody who sat behind me say, 'They have got rid of all the nonsense.'

I thought the costumes and scenery, which were designed by A. E. himself, good, too, though I did not think them simple enough. They were more simple than ordinary stage costumes and scenery, but I would like to see poetical drama, which tries to keep at a distance from daily life that it may keep its emotion untroubled, staged with but two or three colours. The background, especially in small theatres, where its form is broken up and lost when the stage is at all crowded, should, I think be thought out as one thinks out the background of a portrait. One often needs nothing more than a single colour, with perhaps a few shadowy forms to suggest wood or mountain. Even on a large stage one should leave the description of the poet free to call up the martlet's procreant cradle or what he will. But I have written enough about decorative scenery elsewhere, and will probably lecture on that and like matters before we begin the winter's work.

The performances of *Deirdre* and *Cathleen ni Houlihan,* which will be repeated in the Antient Concert Rooms, drew so many to hear them that great numbers were turned away from the doors of St. Theresa's Hall. Like the plays of the Irish Literary Theatre, they started unexpected discussion. Mr. Standish O'Grady, who had done more than any other to make us know the old legends, wrote in his *All Ireland Review* that old legends could not be staged without danger of 'banishing the soul of the land.' The old Irish had many wives, for instance, and we had best leave their histories to the vagueness of legend. How could uneducated people understand heroes who lived amid such different circumstances? And so we were to 'leave heroic cycles alone, and not to bring them down to the crowd.' A. E. replied in *The United Irishman* with an impassioned letter. 'The old, forgotten music' he writes about in his letter is, I think, that regulated music of speech at which both he and I have been working, though on somewhat different principles. I have been working with Miss Farr and Mr. Arnold Dolmetsch, who has made a psaltery for the purpose, to perfect a music of speech which can be recorded in something like ordinary musical notes; while A. E. has got a musician to record little chants with in-

tervals much smaller than those of modern music.

After the production of these plays the most important Irish dramatic event was, no doubt, the acting of Dr. Hyde's *An Posadh,* in Galway. Through an accident it had been very badly rehearsed, but his own acting made amends. One could hardly have had a play that grew more out of the life of the people who saw it. There may have been old men in that audience who remembered its hero the poet Raftery, and there was nobody there who had not come from hearing his poems repeated at the Galway Feis. I think from its effect upon the audience that this play, in which the chief Gaelic poet of our time celebrates his forerunner in simplicity, will be better liked in Connaught at any rate than even *Casadh an t-Sugain.* His *Tincear agus Sidheog,* acted in Mr. Moore's garden, at the time of the Oireachtas, is a very good play, but is, I think, the least interesting of his plays as literature. His imagination, which is essentially the folk-imagination, needs a looser construction, and probably a more crowded stage. A play that gets its effect by keeping close to one idea reminds us, when it comes from the hands of a folk-poet, of Blake's saying, that 'Improvement makes straight

roads, but the crooked roads are the roads of genius.' The idea loses the richness of its own life, while it destroys the wayward life of his mind by bringing it under too stern a law. Nor could charming verses make amends for that second kiss in which there was profanation, and for that abounding black bottle. Did not M. Trebulet Bonhommie discover that one spot of ink would kill a swan?

Among the other plays in Irish acted during the year, Father Dineen's *Tobar Draoidheachta* is probably the best. He has given up the many scenes of his *Creadeamh agus Gorta,* and has written a play in one scene, which, as it can be staged without much trouble, has already been played in several places. One admires its *naïveté* as much as anything else. Father Dineen, who, no doubt, remembers how Finn mac Cumhal when a child was put in a field to catch hares and keep him out of mischief, has sent the rival lovers of his play, when he wanted them off the scene for a moment, to catch a hare that has crossed the stage. When they return the good lover is carrying it by the heels, and modestly compares it to a lame jackass. One rather likes this bit of nonsense when one comes to it, for in that world of folk-imagination one thing seems

as possible as another. On the other hand, there is a moment of beautiful dramatic tact. The lover gets a letter telling of the death of a relative in America, for whom he has no particular affection, and who has left him a fortune. He cannot lament, for that would be insincere, and his first words must not be rejoicing. Father Dineen has found for him the one beautiful thing he could say, 'It's a lonesome thing death is.' With, perhaps, less beauty than there is in the closing scene of *Creadeamh agus Gorta,* the play has more fancy and a more sustained energy.

Father Peter O'Leary has written a play in his usual number of scenes which has not been published, but has been acted amid much Munster enthusiasm. But neither that nor *La an Amadan,* which has also been acted, is likely to have any long life on our country stages. A short play, with many changes of scene, is a nuisance in any theatre, and often an impossibility on our poor little stages. Some kind of play, in English, by Mr. Standish O'Grady, has been acted in the open air in Kilkenny. I have not seen it, and I cannot understand anything by the accounts of it, except that there were magic-lantern slides and actors on horseback, and Mr. Standish O'Grady as an Elizabethan night-watchman, speaking prologues, and a

contented audience of two or three thousand people.

As we do not think that a play can be worth acting and not worth reading, all our plays will be published in time. Some have been printed in *The United Irishman* and *The All Ireland Review*. I have put my *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and a little play by Dr. Hyde into this *Samhain*. Once already this year I have had what somebody has called the noble pleasure of praising, and I can praise this *Lost Saint* with as good a conscience as I had when I wrote of *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. I would always admire it, but just now, when I have been thinking that literature should return to its old habit of describing desirable things, I am in the mood to be stirred by that old man gathering up food for fowl with his heart full of love, and by those children who are so full of the light-hearted curiosity of childhood, and by that schoolmaster who has mixed prayer with his gentle punishments. It seems natural that so beautiful a prayer as that of the old saint should have come out of a life so full of innocence and peace. One could hardly have thought out the play in English, for those phrases of a traditional simplicity and of a too deliberate prettiness which become part of an old language would have arisen between the mind and the story.

We might even have made something as unreal as the sentimental schoolmaster of the Scottish novelist, and how many children who are but literary images would we have had to hunt out of our minds before meeting with those little children? Even if one could have thought it out in English one could not have written it in English, unless perhaps in that dialect which Dr. Hyde had already used in the prose narrative that flows about his *Love Songs of Connaught*.

Dr. Hyde has written a little play about the birth of Christ which has the same beauty and simplicity. These plays remind me of my first reading of *The Love Songs of Connaught*. The prose parts of that book were to me, as they were to many others, the coming of a new power into literature. I find myself now, as I found myself then, grudging to propaganda, to scholarship, to oratory, however necessary, a genius which might in modern Irish or in that idiom of the English-speaking country-people discover a new region for the mind to wander in. In Ireland, where we have so much to prove and to disprove, we are ready to forget that the creation of an emotion of beauty is the only kind of literature that justifies itself. Books of literary propaganda and literary history are merely preparations for the creation or understanding of such an emotion.

It is necessary to put so much in order, to clear away so much, to explain so much, that somebody may be moved by a thought or an image that is inexplicable as a wild creature.

I cannot judge the language of his Irish poetry, but it is so rich in poetical thought, when at its best, that it seems to me that if he were to write more he might become to modern Irish what Mistral was to modern Provençal. I wish, too, that he could put away from himself some of the interruptions of that ceaseless propaganda, and find time for the making of translations, loving and leisurely, like those in *Beside the Fire* and *The Love Songs of Connaught*. He has begun to get a little careless lately. Above all I would have him keep to that English idiom of the Irish-thinking people of the west which he has begun to use less often. It is the only good English spoken by any large number of Irish people to-day, and we must found good literature on a living speech. English men of letters found themselves upon the English Bible, where religious thought gets its living speech. Blake, if I remember rightly, copied it out twice, and I remember once finding a few illuminated pages of a new decorated copy that he began in his old age. Byron read it for the sake of style, though I think it did him little

good; and Ruskin founded himself in great part upon it. Indeed, we find everywhere signs of a book which is the chief influence in the lives of English children. The translation used in Ireland has not the same literary beauty, and if we are to find anything to take its place we must find it in that idiom of the poor, which mingles so much of the same vocabulary with turns of phrase that have come out of Gaelic. Even Irish writers of considerable powers of thought seem to have no better standard of English than a schoolmaster's ideal of correctness. If their grammar is correct they will write in all the lightness of their hearts about 'keeping in touch,' and 'object-lessons,' and 'shining examples,' and 'running in grooves,' and 'flagrant violations' of various things. Yet, as Sainte-Beuve has said, there is nothing immortal except style. One can write well in that country idiom without much thought about one's words; the emotion will bring the right word itself, for there everything is old and everything alive and nothing common or threadbare. I recommend to the Intermediate Board—a body that seems to benefit by advice—a better plan than any they know for teaching children to write good English. Let every child in Ireland be set to turn a leading article or a piece of what is called excellent English, written perhaps

by some distinguished member of the Board, into the idiom of his own countryside. He will find at once the difference between dead and living words, between words that meant something years ago and words that have the only thing that gives literary quality—personality, the breath of men's mouths. Zola, who is sometimes an admirable critic, has said that some of the greatest pages in French literature are not even right in their grammar: 'They are great because they have personality.'

The habit of writing for the stage, even when it is not country-people who are the speakers, and of considering what good dialogue is, will help to increase our feeling for style. Let us get back in everything to the spoken word, even though we have to speak our lyrics to the Psaltery or the Harp, for, as A. E. says, we have begun to forget that literature is but recorded speech, and even when we write with care we have begun 'to write with elaboration what could never be spoken.' But when we go back to speech let us see that it is the idiom either of those who have rejected, or of those who have never learned, the base idioms of the newspapers.

Mr. Martyn argued in *The United Irish-*

man some months ago that our actors should try to train themselves for the modern drama of society. The acting of plays of heroic life or plays like *Cathleen ni Houlihan,* with its speech of the country-people, did not seem to him a preparation. It is not; but that is as it should be. Our movement is a return to the people, like the Russian movement of the early seventies, and the drama of society would but magnify a condition of life which the countryman and the artisan could but copy to their hurt. The play that is to give them a quite natural pleasure should tell them either of their own life, or of that life of poetry where every man can see his own image, because there alone does human nature escape from arbitrary conditions. Plays about drawing-rooms are written for the middle classes of great cities, for the classes who live in drawing-rooms; but if you would ennoble the man of the roads you must write about the roads, or about the people of romance, or about great historical people. We should, of course, play every kind of good play about Ireland that we can get, but romantic and historical plays, and plays about the life of artisans and country-people, are the best worth getting. In time, I think, we can make the poetical play a living dramatic form again, and the training our actors will get from plays of country life, with its un-

changing outline, its abundant speech, its extravagance of thought, will help to establish a school of imaginative acting. The play of society, on the other hand, could but train up realistic actors who would do badly, for the most part, what English actors do well, and would, when at all good, drift away to wealthy English theatres. If, on the other hand, we busy ourselves with poetry and the countryman, two things which have always mixed with one another in life as on the stage, we may recover, in the course of years, a lost art which, being an imitation of nothing English, may bring our actors a secure fame and a sufficient livelihood.

1903

I CANNOT describe the various dramatic adventures of the year with as much detail as I did last year, mainly because the movement has got beyond me. The most important event of the Gaelic Theatre has been the two series of plays produced in the Round Room of the Rotunda by the Gaelic League. Father Dineen's *Tobar Draoidheachta,* and Dr. Hyde's *An Posadh,* and a chronicle play about Hugh O'Neill, and, I think, some other plays, were seen by immense audiences. I was not in Ireland for these plays, but a friend tells me that he could only get standing-room one night, and the Round Room must hold about 3000 people. A performance of *Tobar Draoidheachta* I saw there some months before was bad, but I believe there was great improvement, and that the players who came up from somewhere in County Cork to play it at this second series of plays were admirable. The players, too, that brought Dr. Hyde's

An Posadh from Ballaghadereen, in County Mayo, where they had been showing it to their neighbours, were also, I am told, careful and natural. The play-writing, always good in dialogue, is still very poor in construction, and I still hear of plays in many scenes, with no scene lasting longer than four or six minutes, and few intervals shorter than nine or ten minutes, which have to be filled up with songs. The Rotunda chronicle play seems to have been rather of this sort, and I suspect that when I get Father Peter O'Leary's *Meadhbh,* a play in five acts produced at Cork, I shall find the masterful old man, in spite of his hatred of English thought, sticking to the Elizabethan form. I wish I could have seen it played last week, for the spread of the Gaelic Theatre in the country is more important than its spread in Dublin, and of all the performances of Gaelic plays in the country during the year I have seen but one—Dr. Hyde's new play, *Cleamhnas,* at Galway Feis. I got there a day late for a play by the Master of Galway Workhouse, but heard that it was well played, and that his dialogue was as good as his construction was bad. There is no question, however, about the performance of *Cleamhnas* being the worst I ever saw. I do not blame the acting, which was pleasant and natural, in spite of insufficient rehearsal,

but the stage-management. The subject of the play was a match-making. The terms were in debate between two old men in an inner room. An old woman, according to the stage directions, should have listened at the door and reported what she heard to her daughter's suitor, who is outside the window, and to her daughter. There was no window on the stage, and the young man stood close enough to the door to have listened for himself. The door, where she listened, opened now on the inner room, and now on the street, according to the necessities of the play, and the young men who acted the fathers of grown-up children, when they came through the door, were seen to have done nothing to disguise their twenty-five or twenty-six birthdays. There had been only two rehearsals, and the little boy who should have come in laughing at the end came in shouting, 'Ho ho, ha ha,' evidently believing that these were Gaelic words he had never heard before.

The only Gaelic performances I have seen during the year have been ill-done, but I have seen them sufficiently well done in other years to believe my friends when they tell me that there have been good performances. *Inghinidhe na h-Eireann* is always thorough, and one cannot doubt that the performance

of Dr. Hyde's *An Naom ar Iarriad,* by the children from its classes, was at least careful. A powerful little play in English against enlisting, by Mr. Colum, was played with it, and afterwards revived, and played with a play about the Royal Visit, also in English. I have no doubt that we shall see a good many of these political plays during the next two or three years, and it may be even the rise of a more or less permanent company of political players, for the revolutionary clubs will begin to think plays as necessary as the Gaelic League is already thinking them. Nobody can find the same patriotic songs and recitations sung and spoken by the same people, year in year out, anything but mouldy bread. It is possible that the players who are to produce plays in October for the Samhain festival of *Cumann na n-Gaedheal* may grow into such a company.

Though one welcomes every kind of vigorous life, I am, myself, most interested in 'The Irish National Theatre Society,' which has no propaganda but that of good art. The little Camden Street Hall it had taken has been useful for rehearsal alone, for it proved to be too far away, and too lacking in dressing-rooms for our short plays, which involve so many changes. Successful performances were given, however,

at Rathmines, and in one or two country places.

Deirdre, by A. E., *The Racing Lug,* by Mr. Cousins, *The Foundations,* by Mr. Ryan, and my *Pot of Broth,* and *Cathleen ni Houlihan* were repeated, but no new plays were produced until March 14, when Lady Gregory's *Twenty-five* and my *Hour-Glass* drew a good audience. On May 2 the *Hour-Glass, Twenty-five, Cathleen ni Houlihan, Pot of Broth,* and *Foundations* were performed before the Irish Literary Society in London, at the Queen's Gate Hall, and plays and players were generously commended by the Press—very eloquently by the critic of *The Times.* It is natural that we should be pleased with this praise, and that we should wish others to know of it, for is it not a chief pleasure of the artist to be commended in subtle and eloquent words? The critic of *The Times* has seen many theatres and he is, perhaps, a little weary of them, but here in Ireland there are one or two critics who are so much in love, or pretend to be so much in love, with the theatre as it is, that they complain when we perform on a stage two feet wider than Molière's that it is scarce possible to be interested in anything that is played on so little a stage. We are to them foolish sectaries who have revolted against that ortho-

doxy of the commercial theatre, which is so much less pliant than the orthodoxy of the Church, for there is nothing so passionate as a vested interest disguised as an intellectual conviction. If you inquire into its truth it becomes as angry as a begging-letter writer, when you find some hole in that beautiful story about the five children and the broken mangle. In Ireland, wherever the enthusiasts are shaping life, the critic who does the will of the commercial theatre can but stand against his lonely pillar defending his articles of belief among a wild people, and thinking mournfully of distant cities, where nobody puts a raw potato into his pocket when he is going to hear a musical comedy.

The Irish Literary Society of New York, which has been founded this year, produced *The Land of Heart's Desire, The Pot of Broth,* and *Cathleen ni Houlihan,* on June 3 and 4, very successfully, and propose to give Dr. Hyde's Nativity Play, *Drama Breithe Chriosta,* and his *Casadh an t-Sugain, Posadh,* and *Naom ar Iarriad* next year, at the same time of year, playing them both in Irish and in English. I heard too that his Nativity Play will be performed in New York, but I know no particulars except that it will be done in connection with some religious societies. The National Theatre Society will,

I hope, produce some new plays of his this winter, as well as new plays by Mr. Synge, Mr. Colum, Lady Gregory, myself, and others. They have taken the Molesworth Hall for three days in every month, beginning with the 8th, 9th, and 10th of October, when they will perform Mr. Synge's *Shadow of the Glen,* a little country comedy, full of a humour that is at once harsh and beautiful, *Cathleen ni Houlihan,* and a longish one-act play in verse of my own, called *The King's Threshold.* This play is founded on the old story of Seanchan the poet, and King Guaire of Gort, but I have seen the story from the poet's point of view, and not, like the old story-tellers, from the king's. Our repertory of plays is increasing steadily, and when the winter's work is finished, a play[1] Mr. Bernard Shaw has promised us may be ready to open the summer session. His play will, I imagine, unlike the plays we write for ourselves, be long enough to fill an evening, and it will, I know, deal with Irish public life and character. Mr. Shaw, more than anybody else, has the love of mischief that is so near the core of Irish intellect, and should have an immense popularity among us. I have seen a crowd of many thousands

[1] This play was *John Bull's Other Island.* When it came out in the spring of 1905 we felt ourselves unable to cast it without wronging Mr. Shaw. We had no 'Broadbent' or money to get one.—W. B. Y., March 1908.

in possession of his spirit, and keeping the possession to the small hours.

This movement should be important even to those who are not especially interested in the Theatre, for it may be a morning cock-crow to that impartial meditation about character and destiny we call the artistic life in a country where everybody, if we leave out the peasant who has his folk-songs and his music, has thought the arts useless unless they have helped some kind of political action, and has, therefore, lacked the pure joy that only comes out of things that have never been indentured to any cause. The play which is mere propaganda shows its leanness more obviously than a propagandist poem or essay, for dramatic writing is so full of the stuff of daily life that a little falsehood, put in that the moral may come right in the end, contradicts our experience. If Father Dineen or Dr. Hyde were asked why they write their plays, they would say they write them to help their propaganda; and yet when they begin to write the form constrains them, and they become artists—one of them a very considerable artist, indeed. Dr. Hyde's early poems have even in translation a *naïveté* and wildness that sets them, as I think, among the finest poetry of our time; but he had ceased to write any verses but those Oir-

eachtas odes that are but ingenious rhetoric. It is hard to write without the sympathy of one's friends, and though the country people sang his verses the readers of Irish read them but little, partly it may be because he had broken with that elaborate structure of later Irish poetry which seemed a necessary part of their propaganda. They read plenty of pamphlets and grammars, but they disliked—as do other people in Ireland—serious reading, reading that is an end and not a means, that gives us nothing but a beauty indifferent to our profuse purposes. But now Dr. Hyde with his cursing Hanrahan, his old saint at his prayers, is a poet again; and the Leaguers go to his plays in thousands—and applaud in the right places, too—and the League puts many sixpences into its pocket.

We who write in English have a more difficult work, for English has been the language in which the Irish cause has been debated; and we have to struggle with traditional phrases and traditional points of view. Many would give us limitless freedom as to the choice of subject, understanding that it is precisely those subjects on which people feel most passionately, and, therefore, most dramatically, we would be forbidden to handle if we made any compromise with

powers. But fewer know that we must encourage every writer to see life afresh, even though he sees it with strange eyes. Our National Theatre must be so tolerant, and, if this is not too wild a hope, find an audience so tolerant, that the half-dozen minds who are likely to be the dramatic imagination of Ireland for this generation may put their own thoughts and their own characters into their work; and for that reason no one who loves the arts, whether among Unionists or among the Patriotic Societies, should take offence if we refuse all but every kind of patronage. I do not say every kind, for if a mad king, a king so mad that he loved the arts and their freedom, should offer us unconditioned millions, I, at any rate, would give my voice for accepting them.

We will be able to find conscientious playwrights and players, for our young men have a power of work, when they are interested in their work, one does not look for outside a Latin nation, and if we were certain of being granted this freedom we would be certain that the work would grow to great importance. It is a supreme moment in the life of a nation when it is able to turn now and again from its preoccupations, to delight in the capricious power of the artist as one delights in the movement of some

wild creature, but nobody can tell with certainty when that moment is at hand.

The two plays in this year *Samhain* represent the two sides of the movement very well, and are both written out of a deep knowledge of the life of the people. It should be unnecessary to praise Dr. Hyde's comedy,[1] that comes up out of the foundation of human life, but Mr. Synge is a new writer and a creation of our movement. He has gone every summer for some years past to the Arran Islands, and lived there in the houses of the fishers, speaking their language and living their lives, and his play[2] seems to me the finest piece of tragic work done in Ireland of late years. One finds in it, from first to last, the presence of the sea, and a sorrow that has majesty as in the work of some ancient poet.

[1] *The Poor House,* written in Irish by Dr. Hyde on a scenario by Lady Gregory.

[2] *Riders to the Sea.* This play made its way very slowly with our audiences, but is now very popular.—W. B. Y., March 1908.

THE REFORM OF THE THEATRE

I THINK the theatre must be reformed in its plays, its speaking, its acting, and its scenery. That is to say, I think there is nothing good about it at present.

First. We have to write or find plays that will make the theatre a place of intellectual excitement—a place where the mind goes to be liberated as it was liberated by the theatres of Greece and England and France at certain great moments of their history, and as it is liberated in Scandinavia to-day. If we are to do this we must learn that beauty and truth are always justified of themselves, and that their creation is a greater service to our country than writing that compromises either in the seeming service of a cause. We will, doubtless, come more easily to truth and beauty because we love some cause with all but all our heart; but we must remember when truth and beauty open their mouths to speak, that all other mouths should be as silent as Finn bade the Son of Lugaidh be in the houses of the

great. Truth and beauty judge and are above judgement. They justify and have no need of justification.

Such plays will require, both in writers and in audiences, a stronger feeling for beautiful and appropriate language than one finds in the ordinary theatre. Sainte-Beuve has said that there is nothing immortal in literature except style, and it is precisely this sense of style, once common among us, that is hardest for us to recover. I do not mean by style words with an air of literature about them, what is ordinarily called eloquent writing. The speeches of Falstaff are as perfect in their style as the soliloquies of Hamlet. One must be able to make a king of faery or an old countryman or a modern lover speak that language which is his and nobody else's, and speak it with so much of emotional subtlety that the hearer may find it hard to know whether it is the thought or the word that has moved him, or whether these could be separated at all.

If we do not know how to construct, if we cannot arrange much complicated life into a single action, our work will not hold the attention or linger in the memory, but if we are not in love with words it will lack the delicate movement of living speech that is the chief garment of life; and because of this lack the great realists seem to the lovers

of beautiful art to be wise in this generation, and for the next generation, perhaps, but not for all generations that are to come.

Second. But if we are to restore words to their sovereignty we must make speech even more important than gesture upon the stage.

I have been told that I desire a monotonous chant, but that is not true, for though a monotonous chant may be a safer beginning for an actor than the broken and prosaic speech of ordinary recitation, it puts me to sleep none the less. The sing-song in which a child says a verse is a right beginning, though the child grows out of it. An actor should understand how so to discriminate cadence from cadence, and so to cherish the musical lineaments of verse or prose that he delights the ear with a continually varied music. Certain passages of lyrical feeling, or where one wishes, as in the Angel's part in *The Hour-Glass,* to make a voice sound like the voice of an immortal, may be spoken upon pure notes which are carefully recorded and learned as if they were the notes of a song. Whatever method one adopts, one must always be certain that the work of art, as a whole, is masculine and intellectual, in its sound as in its form.

Third. We must simplify acting, especially in poetical drama, and in prose drama

that is remote from real life like my *Hour-Glass*. We must get rid of everything that is restless, everything that draws the attention away from the sound of the voice, or from the few moments of intense expression, whether that expression is through the voice or through the hands; we must from time to time substitute for the movements that the eye sees the nobler movements that the heart sees, the rhythmical movements that seem to flow up into the imagination from some deeper life than that of the individual soul.

Fourth. Just as it is necessary to simplify gesture that it may accompany speech without being its rival, it is necessary to simplify both the form and the colour of scenery and costume. As a rule the background should be but a single colour, so that the persons in the play, wherever they stand, may harmonise with it and preoccupy our attention. In other words, it should be thought out not as one thinks out a landscape, but as if it were the background of a portrait, and this is especially necessary on a small stage where the moment the stage is filled the painted forms of the background are broken up and lost. Even when one has to represent trees or hills they should be treated in most cases decoratively, they should be little more than an unobtrusive pattern. There must be

nothing unnecessary, nothing that will distract the attention from speech and movement. An art is always at its greatest when it is most human. Greek acting was great because it did all but everything with the voice, and modern acting may be great when it does everything with voice and movement. But an art which smothers these things with bad painting, with innumerable garish colours, with continual restless mimicries of the surface of life, is an art of fading humanity, a decaying art.

MORAL AND IMMORAL PLAYS

A WRITER in *The Leader* has said that I told my audience after the performance of *The Hour-Glass* that I did not care whether a play was moral or immoral. He said this without discourtesy, and as I have noticed that people are generally discourteous when they write about morals, I think that I owe him upon my part the courtesy of an explanation. I did not say that I did not care whether a play was moral or immoral, for I have always been of Verhaeren's opinion that a masterpiece is a portion of the conscience of mankind. My objection was to the rough-and-ready conscience of the newspaper and the pulpit in a matter so delicate and so difficult as literature. Every generation of men of letters has been called immoral by the pulpit or the newspaper, and it has been precisely when that generation has been illuminating some obscure corner of the conscience that the cry against it has been more confident.

The plays of Shakespeare had to be performed on the south side of the Thames because the Corporation of London considered all plays immoral. Goethe was thought dangerous to faith and morals for two or three generations. Every educated man knows how great a portion of the conscience of mankind is in Flaubert and Balzac, and yet their books have been proscribed in the courts of law, and I found some time ago that our own National Library, though it had two books on the genius of Flaubert, had refused on moral grounds to have any books written by him. With these stupidities in one's memory, how can one, as many would have us, arouse the mob, and in this matter the pulpit and the newspaper are but voices of the mob, against the English theatre in Ireland upon moral grounds? If that theatre became conscientious as men of letters understand the conscience, many that now cry against it would think it even less moral, for it would be more daring, more logical, more free-spoken. The English theatre is demoralising, not because it delights in the husband, the wife, and the lover, a subject which has inspired great literature in most ages of the world, but because the illogical thinking and insincere feeling we call bad writing make the mind timid and the heart effeminate. I saw an English play in

Dublin a few months ago called *Mice and Men*. It had run for five hundred nights in London, and been called by all the newspapers 'a pure and innocent play,' 'a welcome relief,' and so on. In it occurred this incident: The typical scapegrace hero of the stage, a young soldier, who is in love with the wife of another, goes away for a couple of years, and when he returns finds that he is in love with a marriageable girl. His mistress, who has awaited his return with what is represented as faithful love, sends him a letter of welcome, and because he has grown virtuous of a sudden he returns it unopened, and with so careless a scorn that the husband intercepts it; and the dramatist approves this manner of crying off with an old love, and rings down the curtain on his marriage bells. Men who would turn out of their club a man who could so treat a letter from his mistress bring their wives and daughters to admire him upon the stage, so demoralising is a drama that has no intellectual tradition behind it. I could not endure it, and went out into the street and waited there until the end of the play, when I came in again to find the friends I had brought to hear it, but had I been accustomed to the commercial theatre I would not even have known that anything strange had happened upon the stage. If a man of

intellect had written of such an incident he would have made his audience feel for the mistress that sympathy one feels for all that have suffered insult, and for that young man an ironical emotion that might have marred the marriage bells, and who knows what the curate and the journalist would have said of the man of intellect? Even Ireland would have cried out: Catholic Ireland that should remember the gracious tolerance of the Church when all nations were its children, and how Wolfram of Eschenbach sang from castle to castle of the courtesy of Parzival, the good husband, and of Gawain, the light lover, in that very Thuringia where a generation later the lap of St. Elizabeth was full of roses. A Connaught Bishop told his people a while since that they 'should never read stories about the degrading passion of love,' and one can only suppose that, being ignorant of a chief glory of his Church, he has never understood that this new puritanism is but an English cuckoo.

AN IRISH NATIONAL THEATRE

[The performance of Mr. Synge's *Shadow of the Glen* started a quarrel with the extreme national party, and the following paragraphs are from letters written in the play's defence. The organ of the party was at the time *The United Irishman,* but the first serious attack began in *The Independent. The United Irishman,* however, took up the quarrel, and from that time on has attacked almost every play produced at our theatre, and the suspicion it managed to arouse among the political clubs against Mr. Synge especially led a few years later to the organised attempt to drive *The Playboy of the Western World* from the stage.—W. B. Y., 1908.]

When we were all fighting about the selection of books for the New Irish Library some ten years ago, we had to discuss the question, What is National Poetry? In those days a patriotic young man would have thought but poorly of himself if he did not believe that *The Spirit of the Nation* was great lyric poetry, and a much finer kind of poetry than Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind,* or Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn.* When two or three of us denied this, we were told that

we had effeminate tastes or that we were putting Ireland in a bad light before her enemies. If one said that *The Spirit of the Nation* was but salutary rhetoric, England might overhear us and take up the cry. We said it, and who will say that Irish literature has not a greater name in the world to-day than it had ten years ago?

To-day there is another question that we must make up our minds about, and an even more pressing one, What is a National Theatre? A man may write a book of lyrics if he have but a friend or two that will care for them, but he cannot write a good play if there are not audiences to listen to it. If we think that a national play must be as near as possible a page out of *The Spirit of the Nation* put into dramatic form, and mean to go on thinking it to the end, then we may be sure that this generation will not see the rise in Ireland of a theatre that will reflect the life of Ireland as the Scandinavian theatre reflects the Scandinavian life. The brazen head has an unexpected way of falling to pieces. We have a company of admirable and disinterested players, and the next few months will, in all likelihood, decide whether a great work for this country is to be accomplished. The poetry of Young Ireland, when it was an attempt to change or strengthen opinion, was rhetoric; but it be-

came poetry when patriotism was transformed into a personal emotion by the events of life, as in that lamentation written by Doheny 'on his keeping' among the hills. Literature is always personal, always one man's vision of the world, one man's experience, and it can only be popular when men are ready to welcome the visions of others. A community that is opinion-ridden, even when those opinions are in themselves noble, is likely to put its creative minds into some sort of prison. If creative minds preoccupy themselves with incidents from the political history of Ireland, so much the better, but we must not enforce them to select those incidents. If, in the sincere working-out of their plot, they alight on a moral that is obviously and directly serviceable to the National cause, so much the better, but we must not force that moral upon them. I am a Nationalist, and certain of my intimate friends have made Irish politics the business of their lives, and this made certain thoughts habitual with me, and an accident made these thoughts take fire in such a way that I could give them dramatic expression. I had a very vivid dream one night, and I made *Cathleen ni Houlihan* out of this dream. But if some external necessity had forced me to write nothing but drama with an obviously patriotic intention, instead of

letting my work shape itself under the casual impulses of dreams and daily thoughts, I would have lost, in a short time, the power to write movingly upon any theme. I could have aroused opinion; but I could not have touched the heart, for I would have been busy at the oakum-picking that is not the less mere journalism for being in dramatic form. Above all, we must not say that certain incidents which have been a part of literature in all other lands are forbidden to us. It may be our duty, as it has been the duty of many dramatic movements, to bring new kinds of subjects into the theatre, but it cannot be our duty to make the bounds of drama narrower. For instance, we are told that the English theatre is immoral, because it is preoccupied with the husband, the wife, and the lover. It is, perhaps, too exclusively preoccupied with that subject, and it is certain it has not shed any new light upon it for a considerable time, but a subject that inspired Homer and about half the great literature of the world will, one doubts not, be a necessity to our National Theatre also. Literature is, to my mind, the great teaching power of the world, the ultimate creator of all values, and it is this, not only in the sacred books whose power everybody acknowledges, but by every movement of imagination in song or story or drama that

height of intensity and sincerity has made literature at all. Literature must take the responsibility of its power, and keep all its freedom: it must be like the spirit and like the wind that bloweth where it listeth; it must claim its right to pierce through every crevice of human nature, and to describe the relation of the soul and the heart to the facts of life and of law, and to describe that relation as it is, not as we would have it be; and in so far as it fails to do this it fails to give us that foundation of understanding and charity for whose lack our moral sense can be but cruelty. It must be as incapable of telling a lie as nature, and it must sometimes say before all the virtues, 'The greatest of these is charity.' Sometimes the patriot will have to falter and the wife to desert her home, and neither be followed by divine vengeance or man's judgement. At other moments it must be content to judge without remorse, compelled by nothing but its own capricious spirit that has yet its message from the foundation of the world. Aristophanes held up the people of Athens to ridicule, and even prouder of that spirit than of themselves, they invited the foreign ambassadors to the spectacle.

I would sooner our theatre failed through the indifference or hostility of our audiences than gained an immense popularity by any

loss of freedom. I ask nothing that my masters have not asked for, but I ask all that they were given. I ask no help that would limit our freedom from either official or patriotic hands, though I am glad of the help of any who love the arts so dearly that they would not bring them into even honourable captivity. A good Nationalist is, I suppose, one who is ready to give up a great deal that he may preserve to his country whatever part of her possessions he is best fitted to guard, and that theatre where the capricious spirit that bloweth as it listeth has for a moment found a dwelling-place, has good right to call itself a National Theatre.

THE THEATRE, THE PULPIT, AND THE NEWSPAPERS

I WAS very well content when I read an unmeasured attack in *The Independent* on the Irish National Theatre. There had, as yet, been no performance, but the attack was confident, and it was evident that the writer's ears were full of rumours and whisperings. One knew that some such attack was inevitable, for every dramatic movement that brought any new power into literature arose among precisely these misunderstandings and animosities. Drama, the most immediately powerful form of literature, the most vivid image of life, finds itself opposed, as no other form of literature does, to those enemies of life, the chimeras of the Pulpit and the Press. When a country has not begun to care for literature, or has forgotten the taste for it, and most modern countries seem to pass through this stage, these chimeras are hatched in every basket. Certain generalisations are everywhere substituted

for life. Instead of individual men and women and living virtues differing as one star differeth from another in glory, the public imagination is full of personified averages, partisan fictions, rules of life that would drill everybody into the one posture, habits that are like the pinafores of charity-school children. The priest, trained to keep his mind on the strength of his Church and the weakness of his congregation, would have all mankind painted with a halo or with horns. Literature is nothing to him, he has to remember that Seaghan the Fool might take to drinking again if he knew of pleasant Falstaff, and that Paudeen might run after Red Sarah again if some strange chance put Plutarch's tale of Anthony or Shakespeare's play into his hands, and he is in a hurry to shut out of the schools that Pandora's box, *The Golden Treasury*. The newspaper he reads of a morning has not only the haloes and horns of the vestry, but it has crowns and fools' caps of its own. Life, which in its essence is always surprising, always taking some new shape, always individualising, is nothing to it, it has to move men in squads, to keep them in uniform, with their faces to the right enemy, and enough hate in their hearts to make the muskets go off. It may know its business well, but its business is building and ours is shattering. We cannot

linger very long in this great dim temple where the wooden images sit all round upon thrones, and where the worshippers kneel, not knowing whether they tremble because their gods are dead or because they fear they may be alive. In the idol-house every god, every demon, every virtue, every vice, has been given its permanent form, its hundred hands, its elephant trunk, its monkey head. The man of letters looks at those kneeling worshippers who have given up life for a posture, whose nerves have dried up in the contemplation of lifeless wood. He swings his silver hammer and the keepers of the temple cry out, prophesying evil, but he must not mind their cries and their prophecies, but break the wooden necks in two and throw down the wooden bodies. Life will put living bodies in their place till new image-brokers have set up their benches.

Whenever literature becomes powerful, the priest, whose forerunner imagined St. Patrick driving his chariot-wheels over his own erring sister, has to acknowledge, or to see others acknowledge, that there is no evil that men and women may not be driven into by their virtues all but as readily as by their vices, and the politician, that it is not always clean hands that serve a country or foul hands that ruin it. He may even have to say at last, as an old man who had spent

many years in prison to serve a good cause said to me, 'There never was a cause so evil that it has not been served by good men for what seemed to them sufficient reasons.' And if the priest or the politician should say to the man of letters, 'Into how dangerous a state of mind are you not bringing us?' the man of letters can but answer, 'It is dangerous, indeed,' and say, like my Seanchan, 'When did we promise safety?'

Thought takes the same form age after age, and the things that people have said to me about this intellectual movement of ours have, I doubt not, been said in every country to every writer who was a disturber of the old life. When *The Countess Cathleen* was produced, the very girls in the shops complained to us that to describe an Irishwoman as selling her soul to the devil was to slander the country. The silver hammer had threatened, as it seems, one of those personifications of an average. Some one said to me a couple of weeks ago, 'If you put on the stage any play about marriage that does not point its moral clearly, you will make it difficult for us to go on attacking the English theatre for its immorality.' Again, we were disordering the squads, the muskets might not all point in the same direction.

Now that these opinions have found a

leader and a voice in *The Independent,* it is easy at any rate to explain how much one differs from them. I had spoken of the capricious power of the artist and compared it to the capricious movements of a wild creature, and *The Independent,* speaking quite logically from its point of view, tells me that these movements were only interesting when 'under restraint.' The writers of the Anglo-Irish movement, it says, 'will never consent to serve except on terms that never could or should be conceded.' I had spoken of the production of foreign masterpieces, but it considers that foreign masterpieces would be very dangerous. I had asked in *Samhain* for audiences sufficiently tolerant to enable the half-dozen minds who are likely to be the dramatic imagination of Ireland for this generation to put their own thought and their own characters into their work. That is to say, I had asked for the amount of freedom which every nation has given to its dramatic writers. But the newspaper hopes and believes that no 'such tolerance will be extended to Mr. Yeats and his friends.'

I have written these lines to explain our thoughts and intentions to many personal friends, who live too deep in the labour of politics to give the thought to these things that we have given, and because not only in

our theatre, but in all matters of national life, we have need of a new discovery of life —of more precise thought, of a more perfect sincerity. I would see, in every branch of our National propaganda, young men who would have the sincerity and the precision of those Russian revolutionists that Kropotkin and Stepniak tell us of, men who would never use an argument to convince others which would not convince themselves, who would not make a mob drunk with a passion they could not share, and who would above all seek for fine things for their own sake, and for precise knowledge for its own sake, and not for its momentary use. One can serve one's country alone out of the abundance of one's own heart, and it is labour enough to be certain one is in the right, without having to be certain that one's thought is expedient also.

1904

THE DRAMATIC MOVEMENT

THE National Theatre Society has had great difficulties because of the lack of any suitable playhouse. It has been forced to perform in halls without proper lighting for the stage, and almost without dressing-rooms, and with level floors in the auditorium that prevented all but the people in the front row from seeing properly. These halls are expensive too, and the players of poetical drama in an age of musical comedy have light pockets. But now a generous English friend, Miss Horniman, has rearranged and in part rebuilt, at very considerable expense, the old Mechanics' Institute Theatre, now the Abbey Theatre, and given us the use of it without any charge, and I need not say that she has gained our gratitude, as she will gain the gratitude of our audience. The work of decoration and alteration has been done by Irishmen, and everything, with the

exception of some few things that are not made here, or not of a good enough quality, has been manufactured in Ireland. The stained glass in the entrance hall is the work of Miss Sarah Purser and her apprentices, the large copper mirror frames are from the new metal works at Youghal, and the pictures of some of our players are by an Irish artist. These details and some details of form and colour in the building, as a whole, have been arranged by Miss Horniman herself.

Having been given the free use of this Theatre, we may look upon ourselves as the first endowed Theatre in any English-speaking country, the English-speaking countries and Venezuela being the only countries which have never endowed their theatres; but the correspondents who write for parts in our plays or posts in the Theatre at a salary are in error. We are, and must be for some time to come, contented to find our work its own reward, the player giving [1] his work, and the playwright his, for nothing; and though this cannot go on always we start our winter very cheerfully with a capital of some forty pounds. We playwrights can only thank these players, who have given us the delight of seeing our work

[1] The players though not the playwrights, are now all paid.—W. B. Y., March 1908. The playwrights have for a good many years now drawn the usual Royalties. —W. B. Y., 1923.

so well performed, working with so much enthusiasm, with so much patience, that they have found for themselves a lasting place among the artists, the only aristocracy that has never been sold in the market or seen the people rise up against it.

It is a necessary part of our plan to find out how to perform plays for little money, for it is certain that every increase in expenditure has lowered the quality of dramatic art itself, by robbing the dramatist of freedom in experiment, and by withdrawing attention from his words and from the work of the players. Sometimes one friend or another has helped us with costumes or scenery, but the expense has never been very great, ten or twenty pounds being enough in most cases for quite a long play. These friends have all accepted the principles I have explained from time to time in *Samhain,* but they have interpreted them in various ways according to their temperament.

Miss Horniman staged *The King's Threshold* at her own expense, and she both designed and made the costumes. The costumes for the coming performances of *On Baile's Strand* are also her work and her gift and her design. She made and paid for the costumes in *The Shadowy Waters,* but

in this case followed a colour-scheme of mine. The colour-scheme in *The Hour-Glass,* our first experiment, was worked out by Mr. Robert Gregory and myself and the costumes were made by Miss Lavelle, a member of the company; while Mr. Robert Gregory has designed the costumes and scenery for *Kincora.* As we gradually accumulate costumes in all the main colours and shades, we will be able to get new effects by combining them in different ways without buying new ones. Small dramatic societies, and our example is beginning to create a number, not having so many friends as we have, might adopt a simpler plan, suggested to us by a very famous decorative artist. Let them have one suit of clothes for a king, another for a queen, another for a fighting man, another for a messenger, and so on, and if these clothes are loose enough to fit different people, they can perform any romantic play that comes without new cost. The audience would soon get used to this way of symbolising, as it were, the different ranks and classes of men, and as the king would wear, no matter what the play might be, the same crown and robe, they could have them very fine in the end. Now, one wealthy theatre-goer and now another might add a pearl to the queen's necklace, or a jewel to her crown, and be the more regular in at-

tendance at the theatre because that gift shone out there like a good deed.

We can hardly do all we hope unless there are many more of these little societies to be centres of dramatic art and of the allied arts. But a very few actors went from town to town in ancient Greece, finding everywhere more or less well-trained singers among the principal townsmen to sing the chorus that had otherwise been the chief expense. In the days of the stock companies two or three well-known actors would go from town to town finding actors for all the minor parts in the local companies. If we are to push our work into the small towns and villages, local dramatic clubs must take the place of the old stock companies. A good-sized town should be able to give us a large enough audience for our whole, or nearly our whole, company to go there; but the need for us is greater in those small towns where the poorest kind of farce and melodrama have gone and Shakespearean drama has not gone, and it is here that we will find it hardest to get intelligent audiences. If a dramatic club existed in one of the larger towns near, they could supply us not only with actors, should we need them, in their own town, but with actors when we went to the small towns and to the villages where the novelty of any kind of drama would make success certain. These

clubs would play in Gaelic far better than we can hope to, for they would have native Gaelic speakers, and should we succeed in stirring the imagination of the people enough to keep the rivalry between plays in English and Irish to a rivalry in quality, the certain development of two schools with distinct though very kindred ideals would increase the energy and compass of our art.

At a time when drama was more vital than at present, unpaid actors, and actors with very little training, have influenced it deeply. The Mystery Plays and the Miracle Plays got their players at no great distance from the Church door, and the classic drama of France had for a forerunner performances of Greek and Latin Classics, given by students and people of quality, and even at its height Racine wrote two of his most famous tragedies to be played by young girls at school. This was before acting had got so far away from our natural instincts of expression. When the play is in verse, or in rhythmical prose, it does not gain by the change, and a company of amateurs, if they love literature, and are not self-conscious, and really do desire to do well, can often make a better hand of it than the ordinary professional company.

The greater number of their plays will, in

all likelihood, be comedies of Irish country life, and here they need not fear competition, for they will know an Irish countryman as no professional can know him; but whatever they play, they will have one advantage the English amateur has not: there is in their blood a natural capacity for acting, and they have never, like him, become the mimics of well-known actors. The arts have always lost something of their sap when they have been cut off from the people as a whole; and when the theatre is perfectly alive, the audience, as at the Gaelic drama to-day in Gaelic-speaking districts, feels itself to be almost a part of the play. I have never felt that the dignity of art was imperilled when the audience at Dr. Hyde's *An Posadh* cheered the bag of flour or the ham lent by some local shopkeepers to increase the bridal gifts. It was not merely because of its position in the play that the Greek chorus represented the people, and the old ballad singers waited at the end of every verse till their audience had taken up the chorus; while Ritual, the most powerful form of drama, differs from the ordinary form, because every one who hears it is also a player. Our modern theatre, with the seats always growing more expensive, and its dramatic art drifting always from the living impulse of life, and becoming more and more

what Rossetti would have called 'soulless self-reflections of man's skill,' no longer gives pleasure to any imaginative mind. It is easy for us to hate England in this country, and we give that hatred something of nobility if we turn it now and again into hatred of the vulgarity of commercial syndicates, of all that commercial finish and pseudo-art she has done so much to cherish. Mr. Standish O'Grady has quoted somebody as saying 'the passions must be held in reverence, they must not, they cannot be excited at will,' and the noble using of that old hatred will win for us sympathy and attention from all artists and people of good taste, and from those of England more than anywhere, for there is the need greatest.

Before this part of our work can be begun, it will be necessary to create a household of living art in Dublin, with principles that have become habits, and a public that has learnt to care for a play because it is a play, and not because it is serviceable to some cause. Our patent is not so wide [1] as we had hoped for, for we had hoped to have a patent as little restricted as that of the Gaiety or the Theatre Royal. We were, however, vigorously opposed by these theatres and by the Queen's Theatre, and the

[1] Our patent has been widened since.—W. B. Y., 1923.

Solicitor-General, to meet them half way, has restricted our patent to plays written by Irishmen or on Irish subjects or to foreign masterpieces, provided these masterpieces are not English. This has been done to make our competition against the existing theatres as unimportant as possible. It does not directly interfere with the work of our society to any serious extent, but it would have indirectly helped our work had such bodies as the Elizabethan Stage Society, which brought *Everyman* to Dublin some years ago, been able to hire the theatre from Miss Horniman, when it is not wanted by us, and to perform there without the limitations imposed by a special license.

Everything that creates a theatrical audience is an advantage to us, and the small number of seats in our theatre would have kept away that kind of drama, in whatever language, which spoils an audience for good work.

The enquiry itself was not a little surprising, for the legal representatives of the theatres, being the representatives of Musical Comedy, were very anxious for the morals of the town. I had spoken of the Independent Theatre, and a lawyer wanted to know if a play of mine which attacked the institution of marriage had not been performed by it recently. I had spoken of M.

Maeterlinck and of his indebtedness to a theatre somewhat similar to our own, and one of our witnesses, who knew no more about it than the questioner, was asked if a play by M. Maeterlinck called *L'Intruse* had not been so immoral that it was received with a cry of horror in London. I have written no play about marriage, and the Independent Theatre died some twelve years ago, and *L'Intruse* might be played in a nursery with no worse effects than a little depression of spirits. Our opponents having thus protested against our morals, went home with the fees of Musical Comedy in their pockets.

For all this, we are better off so far as the law is concerned than we would be in England. The theatrical law of Ireland was made by the Irish Parliament, and though the patent system, the usual method of the time, has outlived its use and come to an end everywhere but in Ireland, we must be grateful to that ruling caste of free spirits, that being free themselves they left the theatre in freedom. In England there is a censor, who forbids you to take a subject from the Bible, or from politics, or to picture public characters, or certain moral situations which are the foundation of some of the greatest plays of the world. When I was

at the great American Catholic University of Notre Dame I heard that the students had given a performance of *Œdipus the King,* and *Œdipus the King* is forbidden in London. A censorship created in the eighteenth century by Walpole, because somebody had written against election bribery, has been distorted by a puritanism, which is not the less an English invention for being a pretended hatred of vice and a real hatred of intellect. Nothing has ever suffered so many persecutions as the intellect, though it is never persecuted under its own name. It is but according to old usage when a law that cherishes Musical Comedy and permits to every second melodrama the central situation of *The Sign of the Cross,* attempted rape, becomes one of the secondary causes of the separation of the English Theatre from life. It does not interfere with anything that makes money, and Musical Comedy, with its hints and innuendoes, and its consistently low view of life, makes a great deal, for money is always respectable; but would a group of artists and students see once again the masterpieces of the world, they would have to hide from the law as if they had been a school of thieves; or were we to take with us to London that beautiful Nativity Play of Dr. Hyde's, which was performed in Sligo Convent a few months ago,

that holy vision of the central story of the world, as it is seen through the minds and the traditions of the poor, the constables might upset the cradle. And yet it is precisely these stories of the Bible that have all to themselves, in the imagination of English people, especially of the English poor, the place they share in this country with the stories of Fion and of Oisin and of Patrick.

Milton set the story of Samson into the form of a Greek play, because he knew that Samson was, in the English imagination, what Herakles was in the imagination of Greece; and I have never been able to see any other subjects for an English Dramatist who looked for some common ground between his own mind and simpler minds. An English poet of genius once told me that he would have tried his hand in plays for the people, if they knew any story the censor would pass, except Jack and the Beanstalk.

The Gaelic League has its great dramatic opportunity because of the abundance of stories known in Irish-speaking districts, and because of the freedom of choice and of treatment the leaders of a popular movement can have if they have a mind for it. The Gaelic plays acted and published during the year selected their subjects from the popular mind, but the treatment is disap-

pointing. Dr. Hyde, dragged from gathering to gathering by the necessities of the movement, has written no new play; and Father Peter O'Leary has thrown his dramatic power, which is remarkable, into an imaginative novel. Father Dineen has published a little play that has some lifelike dialogue, but the action is sometimes irrelevant, and the motives of the principal character are vague and confused, as if it were written in a hurry. Father Dineen seems to know that he has not done his best, for he describes it as an attempt to provide more vivid dialogue for beginners than is to be found in the reading-books rather than a drama. An anonymous writer has written a play called *The Money of the Narrow Cross,* which tells a very simple tale, like that of a child's book, simply and adequately. It is very slight, in low relief as it were, but if its writer is a young man it has considerable promise.

A play called *Seaghan na Scuab* was described in *The United Irishman* as the best play ever written in Irish; but though the subject of it is a dramatic old folk-tale, which has shown its vigour by rooting itself in many countries, the treatment is confused and conventional and there is a flatness of dialogue unusual in these plays. There is,

however, an occasional sense of comic situation which may come to something if its writer will work seriously at his craft. One is afraid of quenching the smoking flax, but this play was selected for performance at the Oireachtas before a vast audience in the Rotunda. It was accompanied by *The Doctor* in English and Irish, written by Mr. O'Beirne, and performed by the Tawin players, who brought it from their seaside village in Galway. Mr. O'Beirne deserves the greatest praise for getting this company together, as well as for all he has done to give the Tawin people a new pleasure in their language; but I think a day will come when he will not be grateful to the Oireachtas Committee for bringing this first crude work of his into the midst of so many thousand people. It would be very hard for a much more experienced dramatist to make anything out of the ugly violence, the threadbare, second-hand imaginations that flow in upon a man out of the newspapers, when he has founded his work on proselytising zeal, instead of his experience of life and his curiosity about it. These two were the only plays, out of a number that have been played in Irish, that I have seen this year. I went to Galway Feis, like many others, to see Dr. Hyde's *Lost Saint,* for I had missed every performance of it hitherto though I had read

it to many audiences in America, and I awaited the evening with some little excitement. Although the *Lost Saint* was on the programme, an Anti-Emigration play was put in its place. I did not wait for this, but, whatever its merits, it is not likely to have contained anything so beautiful as the old man's prayer in the other: 'O Lord, O God, take pity on this little soft child. Put wisdom in his head, cleanse his heart, scatter the mist from his mind and let him learn his lessons like the other boys. O Lord, Thou wert Thyself young one time; take pity on youth. O Lord, Thou, Thyself, shed tears; dry the tears of this little lad. Listen, O Lord, to the prayer of Thy servant, and do not keep from him this little thing he is asking of Thee. O Lord, bitter are the tears of a child, sweeten them: deep are the thoughts of a child, quiet them: sharp is the grief of a child, take it from him: soft is the heart of a child, do not harden it.'

A certain number of propagandist plays are unavoidable in a popular movement like the Gaelic revival, but they may drive out everything else. The plays, while Father Peter O'Leary and Father Dineen and Dr. Hyde were the most popular writers and the chief influence, were full of the traditional folk-feeling that is the mastering in-

fluence in all old Irish literature. Father O'Leary chose for his subjects a traditional story of a trick played upon a simple villager, a sheep-stealer frightened by what seemed to him a ghost, the quarrels between Maeve and Aleel of Cruachan; Father Dineen chose for his a religious crisis, alive as with the very soul of tragedy, or a well sacred to the fairies; while Dr. Hyde celebrated old story-tellers and poets, and old saints, and the Mother of God with the countenance she wears in Irish eyes. Hundreds of men scattered through the world, angry at the spectacle of modern vulgarity, rejoiced in this movement, for it seemed impossible for anything begun in so high a spirit, so inspired by whatever is ancient, or simple, or noble, to sink into the common base level of our thought. This year one has heard little of the fine work, and a great deal about plays that get an easy cheer, because they make no discoveries in human nature, but repeat the opinions of the audience, or the satire of its favorite newspapers. I am only speaking of the plays of a year, and that is but a short period in what one hopes may be a great movement, but it is not wise to say, as do many Gaelic Leaguers, who know the weaknesses of their movement, that if the present thinks but of grammar and propaganda the future will do all the rest.

A movement will often in its first fire of enthusiasm create more works of genius than whole easy-going centuries that come after it.

Nearly everything that is greatest as English prose was written in a generation or two after the first beautiful use of prose in England: and Mistral has made the poems of modern Provençe, as well as reviving and all but inventing the language: for genius is more often of the spring than of the middle green of the year. We cannot settle times and seasons, flowering-time and harvest-time are not in our hands, but we are to blame if genius comes and we do not gather in the fruit or the blossom. Very often we can do no more for the man of genius than to distract him as little as may be with the common business of the day. His own work is more laborious than any other, for not only is thought harder than action, as Goethe said, but he must brood over his work so long and so unbrokenly that he find there all his patriotism, all his passion, his religion even—it is not only those that sweep a floor that are obedient to heaven—until at last he can cry with Paracelsus, 'In this crust of bread I have found all the stars and all the heavens.'

The following new plays were produced

by the National Theatre Society during the last twelve months: *The Shadow of the Glen* and *Riders to the Sea,* by Mr. J. M. Synge; *Broken Soil,* by Mr. Colm [1]; *The Townland of Tamney,* by Mr. Seumas MacManus; *The Shadowy Waters* and *The King's Threshold,* by myself. The following plays were revived: *Deirdre,* by A. E.; *Twenty-five,* by Lady Gregory; *Cathleen ni Houlihan, The Pot of Broth,* and *The Hour-Glass,* by myself. We could have given more plays, but difficulties about the place of performance, the shifting of scenery from where we rehearsed to where we acted, and so on, always brought a great deal of labour upon the Society. The Society went to London in March and gave two performances at The Royalty to full houses. They played there Mr. Synge's two plays, Mr. Colm's play, and my *King's Threshold* and *Pot of Broth.* We were commended by the critics with generous sympathy, and had an enthusiastic and distinguished audience.

We have many plays awaiting performance during the coming winter. Mr. Synge has written us a play in three acts called *The Well of the Saints,* full, as few works of our time are, with temperament, and of

[1] This distinguished writer now spells his name Colum. —W. B. Y., 1923.

a true and yet bizarre beauty. Lady Gregory has written us an historical tragedy in three acts about King Brian and a very merry comedy of country life. Mr. Bernard Shaw has written us a play[1] in four acts, his first experiment in Irish satire; Mr. Tarpey, an Irishman whose comedy *Windmills* was successfully performed by the Stage Society some years ago, a little play which I have not yet seen; and Mr. Boyle, a village comedy in three acts; and I hear of other plays by competent hands that are coming to us. My own *Baile's Strand* is in rehearsal, and I hope to have ready for the spring a play on the subject of *Deirdre*, with choruses somewhat in the Greek manner. We are, of course, offered from all parts of the world great quantities of plays which are impossible for literary or dramatic reasons. Some of them have a look of having been written for the commercial theatre and of having been sent to us on rejection. It will save trouble if I point out that a play which seems to its writer to promise an ordinary London or New York success is very unlikely to please us, or succeed with our audience if it did. Writers who have a better ambition should get some mastery of their art in little plays before spending many months

[1] *John Bull's Other Island.*

of what is almost sure to be wasted labour on several acts.

We were invited to play in the St. Louis Exhibition, but thought that our work should be in Ireland for the present, and had other reasons for refusing.

A Company, which has been formed in America by Miss Witcherly, who played in *Everyman* during a part of its tour in America, to take some of our plays on tour, has begun with three one-act plays of mine, *Cathleen ni Houlihan, The Hour-Glass,* and *The Land of Heart's Desire.* It announces on its circulars that it is following the methods of our Theatre.

Though the commercial theatre of America is as unashamedly commercial as the English, there is a far larger audience interested in fine drama than here. When I was lecturing in, I think, Philadelphia—one town mixes with another in my memory at times—some one told me that he had seen *The Duchess of Malfi* played there by one of the old stock companies in his boyhood; and *Everyman* has been far more of a success in America than anywhere else. They have numberless University towns each with its own character and with an academic life animated by a zeal and by an imagination unknown in these countries. There is

nearly everywhere that leaven of highly-cultivated men and women so much more necessary to a good theatrical audience to-day than were ever Raleigh and Sidney, when the groundling could remember the folk-songs and the imaginative folk-life. The more an age is busy with temporary things, the more must it look for leadership in matters of art to men and women whose business or whose leisure has made the great writers of the world their habitual company. Literature is not journalism because it can turn the imagination to whatever is essential and unchanging in life.

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Two Irish writers had a controversy a month ago, and they accused one another of being unable to think, with entire sincerity, though it was obvious to uncommitted minds that neither had any lack of vigorous thought. But they had a different meaning when they spoke of thought, for the one, though in actual life he is the most practical man I know, meant thought as Pascal, as Montaigne, as Shakespeare, or as, let us say, Emerson, understood it—a reverie about the adventures of the soul, or of the personality, or some obstinate questioning of the riddle. Many who have to work hard always make time for this reverie, but it comes more easily to the leisured, and in this it is like a broken heart, which is, a Dublin newspaper assured us lately, impossible to a busy man. The other writer had in mind, when he spoke of thought, the shaping energy that keeps us busy, and the obstinate questionings he had most respect for were, how to change the method of govern-

ment, how to change the language, how to revive our manufactures, and whether it is the Protestant or the Catholic that scowls at the other with the darker scowl. Ireland is so poor, so misgoverned, that a great portion of the imagination of the land must give itself to a very passionate consideration of questions like these, and yet it is precisely these loud questions that drive away the reveries that incline the imagination to the lasting work of literature and give, together with religion, sweetness, and nobility, and dignity to life. We should desire no more from these propagandist thinkers than that they carry out their work, as far as possible, without making it more difficult for those, fitted by Nature or by circumstance for another kind of thought, to do their work also; and certainly it is not well that Martha chide at Mary, for they have the One Master over them.

When one all but despairs, as one does at times, of Ireland welcoming a National Literature in this generation, it is because we do not leave ourselves enough of time, or of quiet, to be interested in men and women. A writer in *The Leader*, who is unknown to me, elaborates this argument in an article full of beauty and dignity. He is speaking of our injustice to one another and

he says that we are driven into injustice 'not wantonly but inevitably, and at call of the exacting qualities of the great things. Until this latter dawning, the genius of Ireland has been too preoccupied really to concern itself about men and women; in its drama they play a subordinate part, born tragic comedians though all the sons and daughters of the land are. A nation is the heroic theme we follow, a mourning, wasted land its moving spirit; the impersonal assumes personality for us.' When I wrote my *Countess Cathleen,* I thought, of course, chiefly of the actual picture that was forming before me, but there was a secondary meaning that came into my mind continuously: 'It is the soul of one that loves Ireland,' I thought, 'plunging into unrest, seeming to lose itself, to bargain itself away to the very wickedness of the world, and to surrender what is eternal for what is temporary,' and I know that this meaning seemed natural to others, for that great orator, J. F. Taylor, who was not likely to have searched very deeply into any work of mine, for he cared little for mine, or, indeed, any modern work, turned the play into such a parable in one of his speeches.

There is no use being angry with necessary conditions, or failing to see that a man

who is busy with some reform that can only be carried out in a flame of energetic feeling, will not only be indifferent to what seems to us the finer kind of thinking, but that he will support himself by generalisations that seem untrue to the man of letters. A little play, *The Rising of the Moon,* which is in the present number of *Samhain,* and is among those we are to produce during the winter, has, for instance, roused the suspicions of a very resolute leader of the people, who has a keen eye for rats behind the arras. A Fenian ballad-singer partly converts a policeman, and is it not unwise under any circumstances to show a policeman in so favourable a light? It is well known that many of the younger policemen were Fenians: but it is necessary that the Dublin crowds should be kept of so high a heart that they will fight the police at any moment. Are not morals greater than literature? Others have objected to Mr. Synge's *Shadow of the Glen* because Irish women, being more chaste than those of England and Scotland, are a valuable part of our national argument. Mr. Synge should not, it is said by some, have chosen an exception for the subject of his play, for who knows but the English may misunderstand him? Some even deny that such a thing could happen at all, while others that know the country better,

or remember the statistics, say that it could but should never have been staged. All these arguments, by their methods, even more than by what they have tried to prove, misunderstand how literature does its work. Men of letters have sometimes said that the characters of a romance or of a play must be typical. They mean that the character must be typical of something which exists in all men because the writer has found it in his own mind. It is one of the most inexplicable things about human nature that a writer, with a strange temperament, an Edgar Allan Poe, let us say, made what he is by conditions that never existed before, can create personages and lyric emotions, which startle us by being at once bizarre and an image of our own secret thoughts. Are we not face to face with the microcosm, mirroring everything in universal nature? It is no more necessary for the characters created by a romance writer, or a dramatist, to have existed before, than for his own personality to have done so; characters and personality alike, as is perhaps true in the instance of Poe, may draw half their life not from the solid earth, but from some dreamy drug. This is true even of historical drama, for it was Goethe, the founder of the historical drama of Germany, who said, 'We do the people of history the honour of

naming after them the creations of our own minds.' All that a dramatic writer need do is to persuade us, during the two hours' traffic of the stage, that the events of his play did really happen. He must know enough of the life of his country, or of history, to create this illusion, but no matter how much he knows, he will fail if his audience is not ready to give up something of the dead letter. If his mind is full of energy he will not be satisfied with little knowledge, but he will be far more likely to alter incidents and characters, wilfully even as it may seem, than to become a literal historian. It was one of the complaints against Shakespeare, in his own day, that he made Sir John Falstaff out of a praiseworthy old Lollard preacher. One day, as he sat over Holinshed's *History of England,* he persuaded himself that Richard the Second, with his French culture, 'his too great friendliness to his friends,' his beauty of mind, and his fall before dry, repelling Bolingbroke, would be a good image for an accustomed mood of fanciful, impracticable lyricism in his own mind. The historical Richard has passed away for ever and the Richard of the play lives more intensely, it seems, than did ever living man. Yet Richard the Second, as Shakespeare made him, could never have been born before the Renaissance, before the

Italian influence, or even one hour before the innumerable streams that flowed in upon Shakespeare's mind; the innumerable experiences we can never know, brought Shakespeare to the making of him. He is typical not because he ever existed, but because he has made us know of something in our own minds we had never known of had he never been imagined.

Our propagandists have twisted this theory of the men of letters into its direct contrary, and when they say that a writer should make typical characters they mean personifications of averages, of statistics, or even personified opinions, or men and women so faintly imagined than there is nothing about them to separate them from the crowd, as it appears to our hasty eyes. We must feel that we could engage a hundred others to wear the same livery as easily as we could engage a coachman. We must never forget that we are engaging them to be the ideal young peasant, or the true patriot, or the happy Irish wife, or the policeman of our prejudices, or to express some other of those invaluable generalisations, without which our practical movements would lose their energy. Who is there that likes a coachman to be too full of human nature, when he has his livery on? No one man is like another,

but one coachman should be as like another as possible, though he may assert himself a little when he meets the gardener. The patriots would impose on us heroes and heroines, like those young couples in the Gaelic plays, who might all change brides or bridegrooms in the dance and never find out the difference. The personifications need not be true even, if they are about our enemy, for it might be more difficult to fight out our necessary fight if we remembered his virtue at wrong moments; and might not Teig and Bacach, that are light in the head, go over to his party?

Ireland is indeed poor, is indeed hunted by misfortune, and has indeed to give up much that makes life desirable and lovely, but is she so very poor that she can afford no better literature than this? Perhaps so, but if it is a Spirit from beyond the world that decides when a nation shall awake into imaginative energy, and no philosopher has ever found what brings the moment, it cannot be for us to judge. It may be coming upon us now, for it is certain that we have more writers who are thinking, as men of letters understand thought, than we have had for a century, and he who wilfully makes their work harder may be setting himself against the purpose of that Spirit.

I would not be trying to form an Irish

National Theatre if I did not believe that there existed in Ireland, whether in the minds of a few people or of a great number I do not know, an energy of thought about life itself, a vivid sensitiveness as to the reality of things, powerful enough to overcome all those phantoms of the night. Everything calls up its contrary, unreality calls up reality, and, besides, life here has been sufficiently perilous to make men think. I do not think it a national prejudice that makes me believe we are harder, a more masterful race than the comfortable English of our time, and that this comes from an essential nearness to reality of those few scattered people who have the right to call themselves the Irish race. It is only in the exceptions, in the few minds, where the flame has burnt as it were pure, that one can see the permanent character of a race. If one remembers the men who have dominated Ireland for the last hundred and fifty years, one understands that it is strength of personality, the individualising quality in a man, that stirs Irish imagination most deeply in the end. There is scarcely a man who has led the Irish people, at any time, who may not give some day to a great writer precisely that symbol he may require for the expression of himself. The critical mind of Ireland is far more subjugated than the crit-

ical mind of England by the phantoms and misapprehensions of politics and social necessity, but the life of Ireland has rejected them more resolutely. Indeed, it is in life itself in England that one finds the dominion of what is not human life.

We have no longer in any country a literature as great as the literature of the old world, and that is because the newspapers, all kinds of second-rate books, the preoccupation of men with all kinds of practical changes, have driven the living imagination out of the world. I have read hardly any books this summer but Cervantes and Boccaccio and some Greek plays. I have felt that these men, divided from one another by so many hundreds of years, had the same mind. It is we who are different; and then the thought would come to me, that has come to me so often before, that they lived at times when the imagination turned to life itself for excitement. The world was not changing quickly about them. There was nothing to draw their imagination from the ripening of the fields, from the birth and death of their children, from the destiny of their souls, from all that is the unchanging substance of literature. They had not to deal with the world in such great masses that it could only be represented to their

minds by figures and by abstract generalisations. Everything that their minds ran on came to them vivid with the colour of the senses, and when they wrote it was out of their own rich experience, and they found their symbols of expression in things that they had known all their life long. Their very words were more vigorous than ours, for their phrases came from a common mint, from the market, or the tavern, or from the great poets of a still older time. It is the change, that followed the Renaissance and was completed by newspaper government and the scientific movement, that has brought upon us all these phrases and generalisations, made by minds that would grasp what they have never seen. Yesterday I went out to see the reddening apples in the garden, and they faded from my imagination sooner than they would have from the imagination of that old poet, who made the songs of the seasons for the Fianna, or out of Chaucer's, that celebrated so many trees. Theories, opinions, these opinions among the rest, flowed in upon me and blotted them away. Even our greatest poets see the world with preoccupied minds. Great as Shelley is, those theories about the coming changes of the world, which he has built up with so much elaborate passion, hurry him from life continually. There is a phrase

in some old cabalistic writer about man falling into his own circumference, and every generation we get further away from life itself, and come more and more under the influence which Blake had in his mind when he said, 'Kings and Parliament seem to me something other than human life.' We lose our freedom more and more as we get away from ourselves, and not merely because our minds are overthrown by abstract phrases and generalisations, reflections in a mirror that seem living, but because we have turned the table of value upside down, and believe that the root of reality is not in the centre but somewhere in that whirling circumference. How can we create like the ancients, while innumerable considerations of external probability or social utility destroy the seeming irresponsible creative power that is life itself? Who to-day could set Richmond's and Richard's tents side by side on the battlefield, or make Don Quixote, mad as he was, mistake a windmill for a giant in broad daylight? And when I think of free-spoken Falstaff I know of no audience, but the tinkers of the roadside, that could encourage the artist to an equal comedy. The old writers were content if their inventions had but an emotional and moral consistency, and created out of themselves a fantastic, energetic, extravagant art. A Civilisation is

very like a man or a woman, for it comes in but a few years into its beauty, and its strength, and then, while many years go by, it gathers and makes order about it, the strength and beauty going out of it the while, until in the end it lies there with its limbs straightened out and a clean linen cloth folded upon it. That may well be, and yet we need not follow among the mourners, for it may be, before they are at the tomb, a messenger will run out of the hills and touch the pale lips with a red ember, and wake the limbs to the disorder and the tumult that is life. Though he does not come, even so we will keep from among the mourners and hold some cheerful conversation among ourselves; for has not Virgil, a knowledgeable man and a wizard, foretold that other Argonauts shall row between cliff and cliff, and other fair-haired Achæans sack another Troy?

Every argument carries us backwards to some religious conception, and in the end the creative energy of men depends upon their believing that they have, within themselves, something immortal and imperishable, and that all else is but as an image in a looking-glass. So long as that belief is not a formal thing, a man will create out of a joyful energy, seeking little for any external

test of an impulse that may be sacred, and looking for no foundation outside life itself. If Ireland could escape from those phantoms of hers she might create, as did the old writers; for she has a faith that is as theirs, and keeps alive in the Gaelic traditions—and this has always seemed to me the chief intellectual value of Gaelic—a portion of the old imaginative life. When Dr. Hyde or Father Peter O'Leary is the writer, one's imagination goes straight to the century of Cervantes, and, having gone so far, one thinks at every moment that they will discover his energy. It is precisely because of this reason that one is indignant with those who would substitute for the ideas of the folk-life the rhetoric of the newspapers, who would muddy what had begun to seem a fountain of life with the feet of the mob. Is it impossible to revive Irish and yet to leave the finer intellects a sufficient mastery over the more gross, to prevent it from becoming, it may be, the language of a Nation, and yet losing all that has made it worthy of a revival, all that has made it a new energy in the mind?

Before the modern movement, and while it was but new, the ordinary man, whether he could read and write or not, was ready to welcome great literature. When Ariosto

found himself among the brigands, they repeated to him his own verses, and the audience in the Elizabethan Theatres must have been all but as clever as an Athenian audience. But to-day we come to understand great literature by a long preparation, or by some accident of nature, for we only begin to understand life when our minds have been purified of temporary interests by study.

But if literature has no external test, how are we to know that it is indeed literature? The only test that nature gives, to show when we obey her, is that she gives us happiness, and when we are no longer obedient she brings us to pain sooner or later. Is it not the same with the artist? The sign that she makes to him is that happiness we call delight in beauty. He can only convey this in its highest form after he has purified his mind with the great writers of the world; but their example can never be more than a preparation. If his art does not seem, when it comes, to be the creation of a new personality, in a few years it will not seem to be alive at all. If he is a dramatist his characters must have a like newness. If they could have existed before his day, or have been imagined before his day, we may be certain that the spirit of life is not in them in its

fullness. This is because art, in its highest moments, is not a deliberate creation, but the creation of intense feeling, of pure life; and every feeling is the child of all past ages and would be different if even a moment had been left out. Indeed, is it not that delight in beauty, which tells the artist that he has imagined what may never die, itself but a delight in the permanent yet ever-changing form of life, in her very limbs and lineaments? When life has given it, has she given anything but herself? Has she any other reward, even for the saints? If one flies to the wilderness, is not that clear light that falls about the soul when all irrelevant things have been taken away, but life that has been about one always, enjoyed in all its fullness at length? It is as though she had put her arms about one, crying: 'My beloved, you have given up everything for me.' If a man spend all his days in good works till there is no emotion in his heart that is not full of virtue, is not the reward he prays for eternal life? The artist, too, has prayers and a cloister, and if he do not turn away from temporary things, from the zeal of the reformer and the passion of revolution, that zealous mistress will give him but a scornful glance.

What attracts me to drama is that it is,

in the most obvious way, what all the arts are upon a last analysis. A farce and a tragedy are alike in this, that they are a moment of intense life. An action is taken out of all other actions; it is reduced to its simplest form, or at any rate to as simple a form as it can be brought to without our losing the sense of its place in the world. The characters that are involved in it are freed from everything that is not a part of that action; and whether it is, as in the less important kinds of drama, a mere bodily activity, a hair-breadth escape or the like, or as it is in the more important kinds, an activity of the souls of the characters, it is an energy, an eddy of life purified from everything but itself. The dramatist must picture life in action, with an unpreoccupied mind, as the musician pictures her in sound and the sculptor in form.

But if this be true, has art nothing to do with moral judgements? Surely it has, and its judgements are those from which there is no appeal. The character, whose fortune we have been called in to see, or the personality of the writer, must keep our sympathy, and whether it be farce or tragedy, we must laugh and weep with him and call down blessings on his head. This character who delights us may commit murder like

Macbeth, or fly the battle for his sweetheart as did Antony, or betray his country like Coriolanus, and yet we will rejoice in every happiness that comes to him and sorrow at his death as if it were our own. It is no use telling us that the murderer and the betrayer do not deserve our sympathy. We thought so yesterday, and we still know what crime is, but everything has been changed of a sudden; we are caught up into another code, we are in the presence of a higher court. Complain of us if you will, but it will be useless, for before the curtain falls a thousand ages, grown conscious in our sympathies, will have cried *Absolvo te.* Blame if you will the codes, the philosophies, the experiences of all past ages that have made us what we are, as the soil under our feet has been made out of unknown vegetations: quarrel with the acorns of Eden if you will, but what has that to do with us? We understand the verdict and not the law; and yet there is some law, some code, some judgement. If the poet's hand had slipped, if Antony had railed at Cleopatra in the tower, if Coriolanus had abated that high pride of his in the presence of death, we might have gone away muttering the Ten Commandments. Yet maybe we are wrong to speak of judgement, for we have but contemplated life, and what more is there to say

when she that is all virtue, the gift and the giver, the fountain whither all flows again, has given all herself? If the subject of drama or any other art, were a man himself, an eddy of momentary breath, we might desire the contemplation of perfect characters; but the subject of all art is passion, and a passion can only be contemplated when separated by itself, purified of all but itself, and aroused into a perfect intensity by opposition with some other passion, or it may be with the law, that is the expression of the whole whether of Church or Nation or external nature. Had Coriolanus not been a law-breaker, neither he nor we had ever discovered, it may be, that noble pride of his, and if we had not seen Cleopatra through the eyes of so many lovers, would we have known that soul of hers to be all flame, and wept at the quenching of it? If we were not certain of law we would not feel the struggle, the drama, but the subject of art is not law, which is a kind of death, but the praise of life, and it has no commandments that are not positive.

But if literature does not draw its substance from history, or anything about us in the world, what is a National literature? Our friends have already told us, writers for the Theatre in Abbey Street, that we

have no right to the name, some because we do not write in Irish, and others because we do not plead the National cause in our plays, as if we were writers for the newspapers. I have not asked my fellow-workers what they mean by the words National literature, but though I have no great love for definitions, I would define it in some such way as this: It is the work of writers, who are moulded by influences that are moulding their country, and who write out of so deep a life that they are accepted there in the end. It leaves a good deal unsettled—was Rossetti an Englishman, or Swift an Irishman?—but it covers more kinds of National literature than any other I can think of. If you say a National literature must be in the language of the country, there are many difficulties. Should it be written in the language that your country does speak or the language that it ought to speak? Was Milton an Englishman when he wrote in Latin or Italian, and had we no part in Columbanus when he wrote in Latin the beautiful sermon comparing life to a highway and to a smoke? And then there is Beckford, who is in every history of English literature, and yet his one memorable book, a story of Persia, was written in French.

Our theatre is of no great size, for though

we know that if we write well we shall find acceptance among our countrymen in the end, we would think our emotions were on the surface if we found a ready welcome. Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman are National writers of America, although the one had his first true acceptance in France and the other in England and Ireland. When I was a boy, six persons, who, alone out of the whole world it may be, believed Walt Whitman a great writer, sent him a message of admiration, and of those names four were English and two Irish, my father's and Prof. Dowden's. It is only in our own day that America has begun to prefer him to Lowell, who is not a poet at all.

I mean by deep life that men must put into their writing the emotions and experiences that have been most important to themselves. If they say, 'I will write of Irish country-people and make them charming and picturesque like those dear peasants my great-grandmother used to put in the foreground of her water-colour paintings,' then they had better be satisfied with the word 'provincial.' If one condescends to one's material, if it is only what a popular novelist would call local colour, it is certain that one's real soul is somewhere else. Mr. Synge, upon the other hand, who is able to

express his own finest emotions in those curious ironical plays of his, where, for all that, by the illusion of admirable art, every one seems to be thinking and feeling as only countrymen could think and feel, is truly a National writer, as Burns was when he wrote finely and as Burns was not when he wrote 'Highland Mary' and 'The Cotter's Saturday Night.'

A writer is not less National because he shows the influence of other countries and of the great writers of the world. No nation, since the beginning of history, has ever drawn all its life out of itself. Even The Well of English Undefiled, the Father of English Poetry himself, borrowed his metres, and much of his way of looking at the world, from French writers, and it is possible that the influence of Italy was more powerful among the Elizabethan poets than any literary influence out of England herself. Many years ago, when I was contending with Sir Charles Gavan Duffy over what seemed to me a too narrow definition of Irish interests, Professor York Powell either said or wrote to me that the creative power of England was always at its greatest when her receptive power was greatest. If Ireland is about to produce a literature that is important to her, it must be the result of the influences that flow in upon the mind of an

educated Irishman to-day, and, in a greater degree, of what came into the world with himself. Gaelic can hardly fail to do a portion of the work, but one cannot say whether it may not be some French or German writer who will do most to make him an articulate man. If he really achieve the miracle, if he really make all that he has seen and felt and known a portion of his own intense nature, if he put it all into the fire of his energy, he need not fear being a stranger among his own people in the end. There never have been men more unlike an Englishman's idea of himself than Keats and Shelley, while Campbell, whose emotion came out of a shallow well, was very like that idea. We call certain minds creative because they are among the moulders of their nation and are not made upon its mould, and they resemble one another in this only—they have never been fore-known or fulfilled an expectation.

It is sometimes necessary to follow in practical matters some definition which one knows to have but a passing use. We, for instance, have always confined ourselves to plays upon Irish subjects, as if no others could be National literature. Our theatre inherits this limitation from previous movements, which found it necessary and fruitful. Goldsmith and Sheridan and Burke had become so much a part of English life, were

so greatly moulded by the movements that were moulding England, that, despite certain Irish elements that clung about them, we could not think of them as more important to us than any English writer of equal rank. Men told us that we should keep our hold of them, as it were, for they were a part of our glory; but we did not consider our glory very important. We had no desire to turn braggarts, and we did suspect the motives of our advisers. Perhaps they had reasons, which were not altogether literary, for thinking it might be well if Irishmen of letters, in our day also, would turn their faces to England. But what moved me always the most, and I had something to do with forcing this limitation upon our organisations, is that a new language of expression would help to awaken a new attitude in writers themselves, and that if our organisations were satisfied to interpret a writer to his own countrymen merely because he was of Irish birth, the organisations would become a kind of trade union for the helping of Irishmen to catch the ear of London publishers and managers, and for upholding writers who had been beaten by abler Englishmen. Let a man turn his face to us, accepting the commercial disadvantages that would bring upon him, and talk of what is near to our hearts, Irish Kings and Irish

Legends and Irish Countrymen, and we would find it a joy to interpret him. Our one philosophical critic, Mr. John Eglinton, thinks we were very arbitrary, and yet I would not have us enlarge our practice. England and France, almost alone among nations, have great works of literature which have taken their subjects from foreign lands, and even in France and England this is more true in appearance than reality. Shakespeare observed his Roman crowds in London, and saw, one doubts not, somewhere in his own Stratford, the old man that gave Cleopatra the asp. Somebody I have been reading lately finds the Court of Louis the Fourteenth in Phèdre and Andromaque. Even in France and England almost the whole prose fiction professes to describe the life of the country, often of the districts where its writers have lived, for, unlike a poem, a novel requires so much minute observation of the surface of life that a novelist who cares for the illusion of reality will keep to familiar things. A writer will indeed take what is most creative out of himself, not from observation, but experience, yet he must master a definite language, a definite symbolism of incident and scene. Flaubert explains the comparative failure of his Salammbô by saying, 'One cannot frequent her.' He could create her soul, as

it were, but he could not tell with certainty how it would express itself before Carthage fell to ruins. In the small nations which have to struggle for their National life, one finds that almost every creator, whether poet or novelist, sets all his stories in his own country. I do not recollect that Björnson ever wrote of any land but Norway, and Ibsen, though he lived in exile for many years, driven out by his countrymen, as he believed, carried the little seaboard towns of Norway everywhere in his imagination. So far as we can be certain of anything, we may be certain that Ireland with her long National struggle, her old literature, her unbounded folk-imagination, will, in so far as her literature is National at all, be more like Norway than like England or France.

If Literature is but praise of life, if our writers are not to plead the National Cause, nor insist upon the Ten Commandments, nor upon the glory of their country, what part remains for it, in the common life of the country? It will influence the life of the country immeasurably more, though seemingly less, than have our propagandist poems and stories. It will leave to others the defence of all that can be codified for ready understanding, of whatever is the especial business of sermons, and of leading articles;

but it will bring all the ways of men before that ancient tribunal of our sympathies. It will measure all things by the measure not of things visible but of things invisible. In a country like Ireland, where personifications have taken the place of life, men have more hate than love, for the unhuman is nearly the same as the inhuman, but literature, which is a part of that charity that is the forgiveness of sins, will make us understand men no matter how little they conform to our expectations. We will be more interested in heroic men than in heroic actions, and will have a little distrust for everything than can be called good or bad in itself with a very confident heart. Could we understand it so well, we will say, if it were not something other than human life? We will have a scale of virtues, and value most highly those that approach the indefinable. Men will be born among us of whom it is possible to say, not 'What a philanthropist,' 'What a patriot,' 'How practical a man,' but, as we say of the men of the Renaissance, 'What a nature,' 'How much abundant life.' Even at the beginning we will value qualities more than actions, for these may be habit or accident; and should we say to a friend, 'You have advertised for an English cook,' or 'I hear that you have no clerks who are not of your own faith,' or 'You have voted an

address to the king,' we will add to our complaint, 'You have been unpatriotic and I am ashamed of you, but if you cease from doing any of these things because you have been terrorised out of them, you will cease to be my friend.' We will not forget how to be stern, but we will remember always that the highest life unites, as in one fire, the greatest passion and the greatest courtesy.

A feeling for the form of life, for the graciousness of life, for the dignity of life, for the moving limbs of life, for the nobleness of life, for all that cannot be written in codes, has always been greatest among the gifts of literature to mankind. Indeed, the Muses being women, all literature is but their love-cries to the manhood of the world. It is now one and now another that cries, but the words are the same—'Love of my heart, what matter to me that you have been quarrelsome in your cups, and have slain many, and have given your love here and there? It was because of the whiteness of your flesh and the mastery in your hands that I gave you my love, when all life came to me in your coming.' And then in a low voice that none may overhear—'Alas! I am greatly afraid that the more they cry against you the more I love you.'

There are two kinds of poetry, and they

are commingled in all the greatest works. When the tide of life sinks low there are pictures, as in the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and in Virgil at the plucking of the Golden Bough. The pictures make us sorrowful. We share the poet's separation from what he describes. It is life in the mirror, and our desire for it is as the desire of the lost souls for God; but when Lucifer stands among his friends, when Villon sings his dead ladies to so gallant a rhythm, when Timon makes his epitaph, we feel no sorrow, for life herself has made one of her eternal gestures, has called up into our hearts her energy that is eternal delight. In Ireland, where the tide of life is rising, we turn, not to picture-making, but to the imagination of personality—to drama, gesture.

THE PLAY, THE PLAYER, AND THE SCENE

I HAVE been asked to put into this year's *Samhain* Miss Horniman's letter offering us the use of the Abbey Theatre. I have done this, but as Miss Horniman begins her letter by stating that she has made her offer out of 'great sympathy with the Irish National Theatre Company as publicly explained by Mr. Yeats on various occasions,' she has asked me to go more into detail as to my own plans and hopes than I have done before. I think they are the plans and hopes of my fellow-dramatists, for we are all of one movement, and have influenced one another, and have in us the spirit of our time. I discussed them all very shortly in last *Samhain*. And I know that it was that *Samhain*, and a certain speech I made in front of the curtain, that made Miss Horniman entrust us with her generous gift. But last *Samhain* is practically out of print, and my speech has gone even out of my own memory. I will repeat, therefore, much

that I have said already, but adding a good deal to it.

First. Our plays must be literature or written in the spirit of literature. The modern theatre has died away to what it is because the writers have thought of their audiences instead of their subject. An old writer saw his hero, if it was a play of character, or some dominant passion, if it was a play of passion, like Phèdre or Andromaque, moving before him, living with a life he did not endeavour to control. The persons acted upon one another as they were bound by their natures to act, and the play was dramatic, not because he had sought out dramatic situations for their own sake, but because will broke itself upon will and passion upon passion. Then the imagination began to cool, the writer began to be less alive, to seek external aids, remembered situations, tricks of the theatre, that had proved themselves again and again. His persons no longer will have a particular character, but he knows that he can rely upon the incidents, and he feels himself fortunate when there is nothing in his play that has not succeeded a thousand times before the curtain has risen. Perhaps he has even read a certain guide-book to the stage published in France, and called *The Thirty-six Situations of Drama.* The costumes will

be magnificent, the actresses will be beautiful, the Castle in Spain will be painted by an artist upon the spot. We will come from his play excited if we are foolish, or can condescend to the folly of others, but knowing nothing new about ourselves, and seeing life with no new eyes and hearing it with no new ears. The whole movement of theatrical reform in our day has been a struggle to get rid of this kind of play, and the sincere play, the logical play, that we would have in its place, will always seem, when we hear it for the first time, undramatic, unexciting. It has to stir the heart in a long-disused way, it has to awaken the intellect to a pleasure that ennobles and wearies. I was at the first performance of an Ibsen play given in England. It was *The Doll's House,* and at the fall of the curtain I heard an old dramatic critic say, 'It is but a series of conversations terminated by an accident.' So far, we here in Dublin mean the same thing as do Mr. Max Beerbohm, Mr. Walkley, and Mr. Archer, who are seeking to restore sincerity to the English stage, but I am not certain that we mean the same thing all through. The utmost sincerity, the most unbroken logic, give me, at any rate, but an imperfect pleasure if there is not a vivid and beautiful language. Ibsen has sincerity and logic beyond any writer of our time, and

we are all seeking to learn them at his hands; but is he not a good deal less than the greatest of all times, because he lacks beautiful and vivid language? 'Well, well, give me time and you shall hear all about it. If only I had Peter here now,' is very like life, is entirely in its place where it comes, and when it is united to other sentences exactly like itself, one is moved, one knows not how, to pity and terror, and yet not moved as if the words themselves could sing and shine. Mr. Max Beerbohm wrote once that a play cannot have style because the people must talk as they talk in daily life. He was thinking, it is obvious, of a play made out of that typically modern life where there is no longer vivid speech. Blake says that a work of art must be minutely articulated by God or man, and man has too little help from that occasional collaborateur when he writes of people whose language has become abstract and dead. Falstaff gives one the sensation of reality, and when one remembers the abundant vocabulary of a time when all but everything present to the mind was present to the senses, one imagines that his words were but little magnified from the words of such a man in real life. Language was still alive then, alive as it is in Gaelic to-day, as it is in English-speaking Ireland where the Schoolmaster or the newspaper has not cor-

rupted it. I know that we are at the mere beginning, laboriously learning our craft, trying our hands in little plays for the most part, that we may not venture too boldly in our ignorance; but I never hear the vivid, picturesque, ever-varied language of Mr. Synge's persons without feeling that the great collaborateur has his finger in our business. May it not be that the only realistic play that will live as Shakespeare has lived, as Calderon has lived, as the Greeks have lived, will arise out of the common life, where language is as much alive as if it were new come out of Eden? After all, is not the greatest play not the play that gives the sensation of an external reality but the play in which there is the greatest abundance of life itself, of the reality that is in our minds? Is it possible to make a work of art, which needs every subtlety of expression if it is to reveal what hides itself continually, out of a dying, or at any rate a very ailing, language? and all language but that of the poets and of the poor is already bedridden. We have, indeed, persiflage, the only speech of educated men that expresses a deliberate enjoyment of words: but persiflage is not a true language. It is impersonal; it is not in the midst but on the edge of life; it covers more character than it discovers: and yet, such as it is, all our comedies are made out of it.

What the ever-moving, delicately moulded flesh is to human beauty, vivid musical words are to passion. Somebody has said that every nation begins with poetry and ends with algebra, and passion has always refused to express itself in algebraical terms.

Have we not been in error in demanding from our playwrights personages who do not transcend our common actions any more than our common speech? If we are in the right, all antiquity has been in error. The scholars of a few generations ago were fond of deciding that certain persons were unworthy of the dignity of art. They had, it may be, an over-abounding preference for kings and queens, but we are, it may be, very stupid in thinking that the average man is a fit subject at all for the finest art. Art delights in the exception, for it delights in the soul expressing itself according to its own laws and arranging the world about it in its own pattern, as sand strewn upon a drum will change itself into different patterns, according to the notes of music that are sung or played to it. But the average man is average because he has not attained to freedom. Habit, routine, fear of public opinion, fear of punishment here or hereafter, a myriad of things that are 'something other than human life,' something less

than flame, work their will upon his soul and trundle his body here and there. At the first performance of *Ghosts* I could not escape from an illusion unaccountable to me at the time. All the characters seemed to be less than life-size; the stage, though it was but the little Royalty stage, seemed larger than I had ever seen it. Little whimpering puppets moved here and there in the middle of that great abyss. Why did they not speak out with louder voices or move with freer gestures? What was it that weighed upon their souls perpetually? Certainly they were all in prison, and yet there was no prison. In India there are villages so obedient that all the jailer has to do is to draw a circle upon the ground with his staff, and to tell his thief to stand there so many hours; but what law had these people broken that they had to wander round that narrow circle all their lives? May not such art, terrible, satirical, inhuman, be the medicine of great cities, where nobody is ever alone with his own strength? Nor is Maeterlinck very different, for his persons 'enquire after Jerusalem in the regions of the grave, with weak voices almost inarticulate, wearying repose.' Is it the mob that has robbed those angelic persons of the energy of their souls? Will not our next art be rather of the country, of great open spaces, of the soul rejoicing

in itself? Will not the generations to come begin again to have an over-abounding faith in kings and queens, in masterful spirits, whatever names we call them by? I had Molière with me on my way to America, and as I read I seemed to be at home in Ireland listening to that conversation of the people which is so full of riches because so full of leisure, or to those old stories of the folk which were made by men who believed so much in the soul, and so little in anything else, that they were never entirely certain that the earth was solid under the foot-sole. What is there left for us, that have seen the newly discovered stability of things changed from an enthusiasm to a weariness, but to labour with a high heart, though it may be with weak hands, to rediscover an art of the theatre that shall be joyful, fantastic, extravagant, whimsical, beautiful, resonant, and altogether reckless? The arts are at their greatest when they seek for a life growing always more scornful of everything that is not itself and passing into its own fullness, as it were, ever more completely as all that is created out of the passing mode of society slips from it; and attaining that fullness, perfectly it may be—and from this is tragic joy and the perfectness of tragedy—when the world itself has slipped away in death. We, who are believers, cannot see reality

anywhere but in the soul itself, and seeing it there we cannot do other than rejoice in every energy, whether of gesture, or of action, or of speech, coming out of the personality, the soul's image, even though the very laws of nature seem as unimportant in comparison as did the laws of Rome to Coriolanus when his pride was upon him. Has not the long decline of the arts been but the shadow of declining faith in an unseen reality?

> If the sun and moon would doubt,
> They'd immediately go out.

Second. If we are to make a drama of energy, of extravagance, of phantasy, of musical and noble speech, we shall need an appropriate stage-management. Up to a generation or two ago, and to our own generation, here and there, lingered a method of acting and of stage-management, which had come down, losing much of its beauty and meaning on the way, from the days of Shakespeare. Long after England, under the influence of Garrick, began the movement towards Naturalism, this school had a great popularity in Ireland, where it was established at the Restoration by an actor who probably remembered the Shakespearean players. France has inherited

from Racine and from Molière an equivalent art, and, whether it is applied to comedy or to tragedy, its object is to give importance to the words. It is not only Shakespeare whose finest thoughts are inaudible on the English stage. Congreve's *Way of the World* was acted in London last spring, and revived again a month ago, and the part of Lady Wishfort was taken by a very admirable actress, an actress of genius who has never had the recognition she deserves. There is a scene where Lady Wishfort turns away a servant with many words. She cries: 'Go, set up for yourself again, do; drive a trade, do, with your three pennyworth of small ware, flaunting upon a packthread under a brandy-seller's bulk, or against a dead wall by a ballad-monger; go, hang out an old frisoneer-gorget, with a yard of yellow colberteen again, do; an old gnawed mask, two rows of pins, and a child's fiddle; a glass necklace with the beads broken, and a quilted nightcap with one ear. Go, go, drive a trade.' The conversation of an older time, of Urquhart, the translator of Rabelais, let us say, awakes with a little of its old richness. The actress acted so much and so admirably that when she first played it—I heard her better a month ago, perhaps because I was nearer to the stage—I could not understand a word of a passage that re-

quired the most careful speech. Just as the modern musician, through the over-development of an art that seems exterior to the poet, writes so many notes for every word that the natural energy of speech is dissolved and broken and the words made inaudible, so did this actress, a perfect mistress of her own art, put into her voice so many different notes, so run up and down the scale under an impulse of anger and scorn, that one had hardly been more affronted by a musical setting. Everybody who has spoken to large audiences knows that he must speak difficult passages, in which there is some delicacy of sound or of thought, upon one or two notes. The larger his audience, the more he must get away, except in trivial passages, from the methods of conversation. Where one requires the full attention of the mind, one must not weary it with any but the most needful changes of pitch and note, or by an irrelevant or obtrusive gesture. As long as drama was full of poetical beauty, full of description, full of philosophy, as long as its words were the very vesture of sorrow and laughter, the players understood that their art was essentially conventional, artificial, ceremonious.

The stage itself was differently shaped, being more a platform than a stage, for they

did not desire to picture the surface of life, but to escape from it. But realism came in, and every change towards realism coincided with a decline in dramatic energy. The proscenium was imported into England at the close of the seventeenth century, appropriate costumes a generation later. The audience were forbidden to sit upon the stage in the time of Sheridan, the last English-speaking playwright whose plays have lived. And the last remnant of the platform, the part of the stage that still projected beyond the proscenium, dwindled in size till it disappeared in our own day. The birth of science was at hand, the birth-pangs of its mother had troubled the world for centuries. But now that Gargantua is born at last, it may be possible to remember that there are other giants.

We can never bring back old things precisely as they were, but must consider how much of them is necessary to us, accepting, even if it were only out of politeness, something of our own time. The necessities of a builder have torn from us, all unwilling as we were, the apron, as the portion of the platform that came in front of the proscenium used to be called, and we must submit to the picture-making of the modern stage. We would have preferred to be able to return occasionally to the old stage of

statue-making, of gesture. On the other hand, one accepts, believing it to be a great improvement, some appropriateness of costume, but speech is essential to us. An Irish critic has told us to study the stage-management of Antoine, but that is like telling a good Catholic to take his theology from Luther. Antoine, who described poetry as a way of saying nothing, has perfected naturalistic acting and carried the spirit of science into the theatre. Were we to study his methods, we might, indeed, have a far more perfect art than our own, a far more mature art, but it is better to fumble our way like children. We may grow up, for we have as good hopes as any other sturdy ragamuffin.

An actor must so understand how to discriminate cadence from cadence, and so cherish the musical lineaments of verse or prose, that he delights the ear with a continually varied music. This one has to say over and over again, but one does not mean that his speaking should be a monotonous chant. Those who have heard Mr. Frank Fay speaking verse will understand me. That speech of his, so masculine and so musical, could only sound monotonous to an ear that was deaf to poetic rhythm, and no man should, as do London managers, stage a poetical drama according to the de-

sire of those who are deaf to poetical rhythm. It is possible, barely so, but still possible, that some day we may write musical notes as did the Greeks, it seems, for a whole play, and make our actors speak upon them —not sing, but speak. Even now, when one wishes to make the voice immortal and passionless, as in the Angel's part in my *Hour-Glass,* one finds it desirable for the player to speak always upon pure musical notes, written out beforehand and carefully rehearsed. On the one occasion when I heard the Angel's part spoken in this way with entire success, the contrast between the crystalline quality of the pure notes and the more confused and passionate speaking of the Wise Man was a new dramatic effect of great value.

If a song is brought into a play it does not matter to what school the musician belongs if every word, if every cadence, is as audible and expressive as if it were spoken. It must be good speech, and we must not listen to the musician if he promise to add meaning to the words with his notes, for one does not add meaning to the word 'love' by putting four o's in the middle, or by subordinating it even slightly to a musical note. But where can we find a musician so mild, so quiet, so modest, unless he be a sailor from the forecastle or some ghost out of the

twelfth century? One must ask him for music that shall mean nothing, or next to nothing, apart from the words, and after all he is a musician.

When I heard the Æschylean Trilogy at Stratford-on-Avon last spring I could not hear a word of the chorus, except in a few lines here and there which were spoken without musical setting. The chorus was not without dramatic, or rather operatic effect; but why should those singers have taken so much trouble to learn by heart so much of the greatest lyric poetry of Greece? 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star,' or any other memory of their childhood, would have served their turn. If it had been comic verse, the singing-master and the musician would have respected it, and the audience would have been able to hear. Mr. Dolmetsch and Miss Florence Farr have been working for some time to find out some way of setting serious poetry which will enable us to hear it, and the singer to sing sweetly and yet never to give a word, a cadence, or an accent that would not be given it in ordinary passionate speech. It is difficult, for they are trying to re-discover an art that is only remembered or half-remembered in ships and in hovels and among wandering tribes of uncivilised men, and they have to make their experiment with singers who have been

trained by a method of teaching that professes to change a human being into a musical instrument, a creation of science, 'something other than human life.' In old days the singer began to sing over the rocking-cradle or among the wine-cups, and it was as though life itself caught fire of a sudden; but to-day the poet, fanatic that he is, watches the singer go up on to the platform, wondering and expecting every moment that he will punch himself as if he were a bag. It is certainly impossible to speak with perfect expression after you have been a bagpipes for many years, even though you have been making the most beautiful music all the time.

The success of the chorus in the performance of *Hippolytus* last spring—I did not see the more recent performance, but hear upon all hands that the chorus was too large—the expressiveness of the greater portion as mere speech, has, I believe, re-created the chorus as a dramatic method. The greater portion of the singing, as arranged by Miss Farr, even when four or five voices sang together, though never when ten sang together, was altogether admirable speech, and some of it was speech of extraordinary beauty. When one lost the meaning, even perhaps where the whole chorus sang together, it was not because of a defective

method, but because it is the misfortune of every new artistic method that we can only judge of it through performers who must be for a long time unpractised and amateurish. This new art has a double difficulty, for the training of a modern singer makes articulate speech, as a poet understands it, nearly impossible, and those who are masters of speech very often, perhaps usually, are poor musicians. Fortunately, Miss Farr, who has some knowledge of music, has, it may be, the most beautiful voice on the English stage, and is in her management of it an exquisite artist.

That we may throw emphasis on the words in poetical drama, above all where the words are remote from real life as well as in themselves exacting and difficult, the actors must move, for the most part, slowly and quietly, and not very much, and there should be something in their movements decorative and rhythmical as if they were paintings on a frieze. They must not draw attention to themselves at wrong moments, for poetry and indeed all picturesque writing is perpetually making little pictures which draw the attention away for a second or two from the player. The actress who played Lady Wishfort should have permitted us to give a part of our attention to that little shop or wayside booth. Then, too, one must

be content to have long quiet moments, long grey spaces, long level reaches, as it were—the leisure that is in all fine life—for what we may call the business-will in a high state of activity is not everything, although contemporary drama knows of little else.

Third. We must have a new kind of scenic art. I have been the advocate of the poetry as against the actor, but I am the advocate of the actor as against the scenery. Ever since the last remnant of the old platform disappeared, and the proscenium grew into the frame of a picture, the actors have been turned into a picturesque group in the foreground of a meretricious landscape-painting. The background should be of as little importance as the background of a portrait-group, and it should, when possible, be of one colour or of one tint, that the persons on the stage, wherever they stand, may harmonise with it or contrast with it and preoccupy our attention. Their outline should be clear and not broken up into the outline of windows and wainscotting, or lost into the edges of colours. In a play which copies the surface of life in its dialogue we may, with this reservation, represent anything that can be represented successfully—a room, for instance—but a landscape

painted in the ordinary way will always be meretricious and vulgar. It will always be an attempt to do something which cannot be done successfully except in easel painting, and the moment an actor stands near to your mountain, or your forest, one will perceive that he is standing against a flat surface. Illusion, therefore, is impossible, and should not be attempted. We should be content to suggest a scene upon a canvas, whose vertical flatness we accept and use, as the decorator of pottery accepts the roundness of a bowl or a jug. Having chosen the distance from naturalism, which will keep one's composition from competing with the illusion created by the actor, who belongs to a world with depth as well as height and breadth, one must keep this distance without flinching. The distance will vary according to the distance the playwright has chosen, and especially in poetry, which is more remote and idealistic than prose, one will insist on schemes of colour and simplicity of form, for every sign of deliberate order gives remoteness and ideality. But, whatever the distance be, one's treatment will always be more or less decorative. We can only find out the right decoration for the different types of play by experiment, but it will probably range between, on the one hand, woodlands made out of recurring pattern, or

painted like old religious pictures upon gold background, and upon the other the comparative realism of a Japanese print. This decoration will not only give us a scenic art that will be a true art because peculiar to the stage, but it will give the imagination liberty, and without returning to the bareness of the Elizabethan stage. The poet cannot evoke a picture to the mind's eye if a second-rate painter has set his imagination of it before the bodily eye; but decoration and suggestion will accompany our moods, and turn our minds to meditation, and yet never become obtrusive or wearisome. The actor and the words put into his mouth are always the one thing that matters, and the scene should never be complete of itself, should never mean anything to the imagination until the actor is in front of it.

If we remember that the movement of the actor, and the graduation and the colour of the lighting, are the two elements that distinguish the stage picture from an easel painting, we may not find it difficult to create an art of the stage ranking as a true fine art. Mr. Gordon Craig has done wonderful things with the lighting, but he is not greatly interested in the actor, and his streams of coloured direct light, beautiful as they are, will always seem, apart from certain excep-

tional moments, a new externality. We should rather desire, for all but exceptional moments, an even, shadowless light, like that of noon, and it may be that a light reflected out of mirrors will give us what we need.

M. Appia and M. Fortuni are making experiments in the staging of Wagner for a private theatre in Paris, but I cannot understand what M. Appia is doing, from the little I have seen of his writing, excepting that the floor of the stage will be uneven like the ground, and that at moments the lights and shadows of green boughs will fall over the player that the stage may show a man wandering through a wood, and not a wood with a man in the middle of it. One agrees with all the destructive part of his criticism, but it looks as if he himself is seeking, not convention, but a more perfect realism. I cannot persuade myself that the movement of life is flowing that way, for life moves by a throbbing as of a pulse, by reaction and action. The hour of convention and decoration and ceremony is coming again.

The experiments of the Irish National Theatre Society will have of necessity to be for a long time few and timid, and we must often, having no money and not a great deal of leisure, accept for a while compro-

mises, and much even that we know to be irredeemably bad. One can only perfect an art very gradually; and good playwriting, good speaking, and good acting are the first necessity.

1905

Our first season at the Abbey Theatre has been tolerably successful. We drew small audiences, but quite as big as we had hoped for, and we end the year with a little money. On the whole, we have probably more than trebled our audiences of the Molesworth Hall. The same people come again and again, and others join them, and I do not think we lose any of them. We shall be under more expense in our new season, for we have decided to pay some of the company and send them into the provinces, but our annual expenses will not be as heavy as the weekly expenses of the most economical London manager. Mr. Philip Carr, whose revivals of Elizabethan plays and old comedies have been the finest things one could see in a London theatre, spent three hundred pounds and took twelve pounds during his last week; but here in Ireland enthusiasm can do half the work, and nobody is accustomed to get much money, and even Mr. Carr's inexpensive scenery costs more than our simple decorations. Our staging of *Kincora,* the work of Mr.

Robert Gregory, was beautiful, with a high, grave dignity and that strangeness which Ben Jonson thought to be a part of all excellent beauty, and the expense of scenery, dresses and all was hardly above thirty pounds. If we find a good scene we repeat it in other plays, and in course of time we shall be able to put on new plays without any expense for scenery at all. I do not think that even the most expensive decoration would increase in any way the pleasure of an audience that comes to us for the play and the acting.

We shall have abundance of plays, for Lady Gregory has written us a new comedy besides her *White Cockade,* which is in rehearsal; Mr. Boyle, a satirical comedy in three acts; Mr. Colum has made a new play out of his *Broken Soil;* and I have made almost a new one out of my *Shadowy Waters;* and Mr. Synge has practically finished a longer and more elaborate comedy than his last. Since our start last Christmas we have shown eleven plays created by our movement and very varied in substance and form, and six of these were new: *The Well of the Saints, Kincora, The Building Fund, The Land, On Baile's Strand,* and *Spreading the News.*

One of our plays, *The Well of the Saints,* has been accepted for immediate production

by the Deutsches Theater of Berlin; and another, *The Shadow of the Glen,* is to be played during the season at the National Bohemian Theatre at Prague; and my own *Cathleen ni Houlihan* has been translated into Irish and been played at the Oireachtas, before an audience of some thousands. We have now several dramatists who have taken to drama as their most serious business, and we claim that a school of Irish drama exists, and that it is founded upon sincere observation and experience.

As is natural in a country where the Gaelic League has created a preoccupation with the countryman, the greatest number of our plays are founded on the comedy and tragedy of country life, and are written more or less in dialect. When the Norwegian National movement began, its writers chose for their maxim, 'To understand the saga by the peasant and the peasant by the saga.' Ireland in our day has rediscovered the old heroic literature of Ireland, and she has rediscovered the imagination of the folk. My own preoccupation is more with the heroic legend than with the folk, but Lady Gregory in her *Spreading the News,* Mr. Synge in his *Well of the Saints,* Mr. Colum in *The Land,* Mr. Boyle in *The Building Fund,* have been busy, much or little, with the folk and the

folk-imagination. Mr. Synge alone has written of the peasant as he is to all the ages; of the folk-imagination as it has been shaped by centuries of life among fields or on fishing-grounds. His people talk a highly-coloured musical language, and one never hears from them a thought that is of to-day and not of yesterday. Lady Gregory has written of the people of the markets and villages of the West, and their speech, though less full of peculiar idiom than that of Mr. Synge's people, is still always that vivid speech which has been shaped through some generations of English speaking by those who still think in Gaelic. Mr. Colum and Mr. Boyle, on the other hand, write of the countryman or villager of the East or centre of Ireland, who thinks in English, and the speech of their people shows the influence of the newspaper and the National Schools. The people they write of, too, are not the true folk. They are the peasant as he is being transformed by modern life, and for that very reason the man of the towns may find it easier to understand them. There is less surprise, less wonder in what he sees, but there is more of himself there, more of his vision of the world and of the problems that are troubling him.

It is not fitting for the showman to over-praise the show, but he is always permitted

to tell you what is in his booths. Mr. Synge is the most obviously individual of our writers. He alone has discovered a new kind of sarcasm, and it is this sarcasm that keeps him, and may long keep him, from general popularity. Mr. Boyle satirises a miserly old woman, and he has made a very vivid person of her, but as yet his satire is such as all men accept; it brings no new thing to judgement. We have never doubted that what he assails is evil, and we are never afraid that it is ourselves. Lady Gregory alone writes out of a spirit of pure comedy, and laughs without bitterness and with no thought but to laugh. She has a perfect sympathy with her characters, even with the worst of them, and when the curtain goes down we are so far from the mood of judgement that we do not even know that we have condoned many sins. In Mr. Colum's *Land* there is a like comedy when Cornelius and Sally fill the scene, but then he is too young to be content with laughter. He is still interested in the reform of society, but that will pass, for at about thirty every writer, who is anything of an artist, comes to understand that all a work of art can do is to show us the reality that is within our minds, and the reality that our eyes look on. He is the youngest of us all by many years, and we are all proud to foresee his future.

I think that a race or a nation or a phase of life has but few dramatic themes, and that when these have been once written well they must afterwards be written less and less well until one gets at last but 'soulless self-reflections of man's skill.' The first man writes what it is natural to write, the second man what is left to him, for the imagination cannot repeat itself. The hoydenish young woman, the sentimental young woman, the villain and the hero alike ever self-possessed, of contemporary drama, were once real discoveries, and one can trace their history through the generations like a joke or a folk-tale, but, unlike these, they grow always less interesting as they get farther from their cradle. Our opportunity in Ireland is not that our playwrights have more talent—it is possible that they have less than the workers in an old tradition—but that the necessity of putting a life that has not hitherto been dramatised into their plays excludes all these types which have had their origin in a different social order.

An audience with National feeling is alive, at the worst it is alive enough to quarrel with. One man came up from the scene of Lady Gregory's *Kincora* at Killaloe that he might see her play, and having applauded loudly, and even cheered for the Dalcassians, became silent and troubled when Brian took

Gormleith for his wife. 'It is a great pity,' he said to a man next to him, 'that he didn't marry a quiet girl from his own district.' Some have quarrelled with me because I did not take some glorious moment of Cuchulain's life for my play, and not the killing of his son, and all our playwrights have been attacked for choosing bad characters instead of good, and called slanderers of their country. In so far as these attacks come from National feeling, that is to say, out of an interest or an affection for the life of this country now and in past times, as did the countryman's trouble about Gormleith, they are in the long run the greatest help to a dramatist, for they give him something to startle or to delight. Every writer has had to face them where his work has aroused a genuine interest. The Germans at the beginning of the nineteenth century preferred Schiller to Goethe, and thought him the greater writer, because he put noble characters into his books; and when Chaucer encounters Eros in the month of May, that testy god complains that though he had 'sixty bookkes olde and newe,' and all full of stories of women and the life they led, and though for every bad woman there are a hundred good, he has chosen to write only of the bad ones. He complains that Chaucer by his *Troilus* and his *Romaunt of the Rose*

has brought love and women to discredit. It is the same in painting as in literature, for when a new painter arises men cry out, even when he is a painter of the beautiful like Rossetti, that he has chosen the exaggerated or the ugly or the unhealthy, forgetting that it is the business of art and of letters to change the values and to mint the coinage. Without this outcry there is no movement of life in the arts, for it is the sign of values not yet understood, of a coinage not yet mastered. Sometimes the writer delights us, when we grow to understand him, with new forms of virtue discovered in persons where one had not hitherto looked for it, and sometimes—and this is more and more true of modern art—he changes the values not by the persons he sets before one, who may be mean enough, but by his way of looking at them, by the implications that come from his own mind, by the tune they dance to as it were. Eros, into whose mouth Chaucer, one doubts not, puts arguments that he had heard from his readers and listeners, objected to Chaucer's art in the interests of pedantic mediæval moralising; the contemporaries of Schiller commended him for reflecting vague romantic types from the sentimental literature of his predecessors; and those who object to the peasant as he is seen in the Abbey Theatre have their imagina-

tions full of what is least observant and most sentimental in the Irish novelists. When I was a boy I spent many an afternoon with a village shoemaker who was a great reader. I asked him once what Irish novels he liked, and he told me there were none he could read. 'They sentimentalised the people,' he said angrily; and it was against Kickham that he complained most. 'I want to see the people,' he said, 'shown up in their naked hideousness.' That is the peasant mind as I know it, a mind that delights in strong sensations whether of beauty or of ugliness, in bare facts, and is quite without sentimentality. The sentimental mind is found among the middle classes, and it was this mind which came into Irish literature with Gerald Griffin and later on with Kickham.

It is the mind of the town, and it is a delight to those only who have seen life, and above all country life, with unobservant eyes, and most of all to the Irish tourist, to the patriotic young Irishman who goes to the country for a month's holiday with his head full of vague idealisms. It is not the art of Mr. Colum, born of the people, and when at his best looking at the town and not the country with strange eyes, nor the art of Mr. Synge, spending weeks and months in remote places talking Irish to

fishers and islanders. I remember meeting, about twenty years ago, a lad who had a little yacht at Kingstown. Somebody was talking of the sea paintings of a great painter, Hook, I think, and this made him very angry. No yachtsman believed in them or thought them at all like the sea, he said. Indeed, he was always hearing people praise pictures that were not a bit like the sea, and thereupon he named certain of the greatest painters of water—men who more than all others had spent their lives in observing the effects of light upon cloud and wave. I met him again the other day, well on in middle life, and though he is not even an Irishman, indignant with Mr. Synge's and Mr. Boyle's peasants. He knew the people, he said, and neither he nor any other person that knew them could believe that they were properly represented in *The Well of the Saints* or *The Building Fund.* Twenty years ago his imagination was under the influence of popular pictures, but to-day it was under that of the conventional idealism writers like Kickham and Griffin substitute for the ever-varied life of the cottages, and of that conventional idealism that the contemporary English Theatre substitutes for all life whatsoever. I saw *Caste,* the earliest play of the modern school, a few days ago, and found there more

obviously than I expected, for I am not much of a theatre-goer, the English half of the mischief. Two of the minor persons had a certain amount of superficial characterisation, as if out of the halfpenny comic papers; but the central persons, the man and woman that created the dramatic excitement, such as it was, had not characters of any kind, being vague ideals, perfection as it is imagined by a commonplace mind. The audience could give them its sympathy without the labour that comes from awakening knowledge. If the dramatist had put into his play whatever man or woman of his acquaintance seemed to come closest to perfection, he would have had to make it a study, among other things, of the little petty faults and perverted desires that arise out of the nature or its surroundings. He would have troubled that admiring audience by making a self-indulgent sympathy more difficult. He might have even seemed, like Ibsen or the early Christians, an enemy of the human race. We have gone down to the roots, and we have made up our minds upon one thing quite definitely—that in no play that professes to picture life in its daily aspects shall we admit these white phantoms. We can do this, not because we have any special talent, but because we are dealing with a life which has for all practical pur-

poses never been set upon the stage before. The conventional types of the novelists do not pervert our imagination, for they are built, as it were, into another form, and no man who has chosen for himself a sound method of drama, whether it be the drama of character or of crisis, can use them. The Gaelic League and *Cumann nan Gaedheal* play does indeed show the influence of the novelists; but the typical Gaelic League play is essentially narrative and not dramatic. Every artist necessarily imitates those who have worked in the same form before him, and when the preoccupation has been with the same life he almost always, consciously or unconsciously, borrows more than the form, and it is this very borrowing—affecting thought, language, all the vehicles of expression—which brings about the most of what we call decadence.

After all, if our plays are slanders upon their country; if to represent upon the stage a hard old man like Cosgar, or a rapacious old man like Shan, or a faithless wife like Nora Burke, or to select from history treacherous Gormleith for a theme, is to represent this nation at something less than its full moral worth; if every play played in the Abbey Theatre now and in times to come be something of a slander, is anybody

a penny the worse? Some ancient or mediæval races did not think so. Jusserand describes the French conquerors of mediæval England as already imagining themselves in their literature, as they have done to this day, as a great deal worse than they are, and the English imagining themselves a great deal better. The greater portion of the *Divine Comedy* is a catalogue of the sins of Italy, and Boccaccio became immortal because he exaggerated with an unceasing playful wit the vices of his countryside. The Greeks chose for the themes of their serious literature a few great crimes, and Corneille, in his article on the theory of the drama, shows why the greatness and notoriety of these crimes is necessary to tragic drama. The public life of Athens found its chief celebration in the monstrous caricature of Aristophanes, and the Greek nation was so proud, so free from morbid sensitiveness, that it invited the foreign ambassadors to the spectacle. And I answer to those who say that Ireland cannot afford this freedom because of her political circumstances, that if Ireland cannot afford it, Ireland cannot have a literature. Literature has never been the work of slaves, and Ireland must learn to say—

> Stone walls do not a prison make,
> Nor iron bars a cage.

The misrepresentation of the average life of a nation that follows of necessity from an imaginative delight in energetic characters and extreme types, enlarges the energy of a people by the spectacle of energy. A nation is injured by the picking out of a single type and setting that into print or upon the stage as a type of the whole nation. Ireland suffered for a century from that single whisky-drinking, humorous type which seemed for a time the accepted type of all. The Englishwoman is, no doubt, injured in the same way in the minds of various Continental nations by a habit of caricaturing all Englishwomen as having big teeth. But neither nation can be injured by imaginative writers selecting types that please their fancy. They will never impose a general type on the public mind, for genius differs from the newspapers in this, that the greater and more confident it is, the more is its delight in varieties and species. If Ireland were at this moment, through a misunderstanding terror of the stage Irishman, to deprive her writers of freedom, to make their imaginations timid, she would lower her dignity in her own eyes and in the eyes of every intellectual nation. That old caricature did her very little harm in the long run, perhaps a few car-drivers have copied it in their lives, while the mind of the country

remained untroubled; but the loss of imaginative freedom and daring would turn us into old women. In the long run, it is the great writer of a nation that becomes its image in the minds of posterity, and even though he represent no man of worth in his art, the worth of his own mind becomes the inheritance of his people. He takes nothing away that he does not give back in greater volume.

If Ireland had not lost the Gaelic she never would have had this sensitiveness as of a *parvenu* when presented at Court for the first time, or of a nigger newspaper. When Ireland had the confidence of her own antiquity, her writers praised and blamed according to their fancy, and even, as throughout all mediæval Europe, laughed when they had a mind to at the most respected persons, at the sanctities of Church and State. The story of *The Shadow of the Glen,* found by Mr. Synge in Gaelic-speaking Aran, and by Mr. Curtain in Munster; the Song of *The Red-haired Man's Wife,* sung in all Gaelic Ireland; *The Midnight Court of MacGiolla Meidhre; The Vision of MacCoinglinne;* the old romancers, with their Bricriu and their Conan, laughed and sang as fearlessly as Chaucer or Villon or Cervantes. It seemed almost as if those old

writers murmured to themselves: 'If we but keep our courage let all the virtues perish, for we can make them over again; but if that be gone, all is gone.' I remember when I was an art student at the Metropolitan School of Art a good many years ago, saying to Mr. Hughes the sculptor, as we looked at the work of our fellow-students, 'Every student here that is doing better work than another is doing it because he has a more intrepid imagination; one has only to look at the line of a drawing to see that'; and he said that was his own thought also. All good art is extravagant, vehement, impetuous, shaking the dust of time from its feet, as it were, and beating against the walls of the world.

If a sincere religious artist were to arise in Ireland in our day, and were to paint the Holy Family, let us say, he would meet with the same opposition that sincere dramatists are meeting with to-day. The half-educated mind is never sincere in the arts, and one finds in Irish chapels, above all in Irish convents, the religious art that it understands. A Connaught convent a little time ago refused a fine design for stained glass, because of the personal life in the faces and in the attitudes, which seemed to them ugly, perhaps even impious. They sent to the

designer an insipid German chromo-lithograph, full of faces without expression or dignity, and gestures without personal distinction, and the designer, too anxious for success to reject any order, has carried out this meaningless design in glass of beautiful colour and quality. Let us suppose that Meister Stefan were to paint in Ireland to-day that exquisite Madonna of his, with her lattice of roses; a great deal that is said of our plays would be said of that picture. Why select for his model a little girl selling newspapers in the streets, why slander with that miserable little body the Mother of God? He could only answer, as the imaginative artist always answers, 'That is the way I have seen her in my mind, and what I have made of her is very living. All art is founded upon personal vision, and the greater the art the more surprising the vision; and all bad art is founded upon impersonal types and images, accepted by average men and women out of imaginative poverty and timidity, or the exhaustion that comes from labour.

Nobody can force a movement of any kind to take any prearranged pattern to any very great extent; one can, perhaps, modify it a little, and that is all. When one says that it is going to develop in a certain way, one means that one sees, or imagines

that one sees, certain energies which left to themselves are bound to give it a certain form. Writing in *Samhain* some years ago, I said that our plays would be of two kinds, plays of peasant life and plays of a romantic and heroic life, such as one finds in the folk-tales. To-day I can see other forces, and can foretell, I think, the form of technique that will arise. About fifty years ago, perhaps not so many, the playwrights of every country in the world became persuaded that their plays must reflect the surface of life; and the author of *Caste,* for instance, made a reputation by putting what seemed to be average common life and average common speech for the first time upon the stage in England, and by substituting real loaves of bread and real cups of tea for imaginary ones. He was not a very clever nor a very well-educated man, and he made his revolution superficially; but in other countries men of intellect and knowledge created that intellectual drama of real life, of which Ibsen's later plays are the ripened fruit. This change coincided with the substitution of science for religion in the conduct of life, and is, I believe, as temporary, for the practice of twenty centuries will surely take the sway in the end. A rhetorician in that novel of Petronius, which satirises, or perhaps one should say

celebrates, Roman decadence, complains that the young people of his day are made blockheads by learning old romantic tales in the schools, instead of what belongs to common life. And yet is it not the romantic tale, the extravagant and ungovernable dream which comes out of youth; and is not that desire for what belongs to common life, whether it comes from Rome or Greece or England, the sign of fading fires, of ebbing imaginative-desire? In the arts I am quite certain that it is a substitution of apparent for real truth. Mr. George Moore has a very vivid character; he is precisely one of those whose characters can be represented most easily upon the stage. Let us suppose that some dramatist had made even him the centre of a play in which the moderation of common life was carefully preserved, how very little he could give us of that headlong intrepid man, as we know him, whether through long personal knowledge or through his many books. The more carefully the play reflected the surface of life the more would the elements be limited to those that naturally display themselves during so many minutes of our ordinary affairs. It is only by extravagance, by an emphasis far greater than that of life as we observe it, that we can crowd into a few minutes the knowledge of years. Shakespeare or Sophocles can so

quicken, as it were, the circles of the clock, so heighten the expression of life, that many years can unfold themselves in a few minutes, and it is always Shakespeare or Sophocles, and not Ibsen, that makes us say, 'How true, how often I have felt as that man feels'; or 'How intimately I have come to know those people on the stage.' There is a certain school of painters that has discovered that it is necessary in the representation of light to put little touches of pure colour side by side. When you went up close to that big picture of the Alps by Segantini, in Mr. Lane's Loan Exhibition a year ago, you found that the grass seeds, which looked brown enough from the other side of the room, were full of pure scarlet colour. If you copy nature's moderation of colour you do not imitate her, for you have only white paint and she has light. If you wish to represent character or passion upon the stage, as it is known to the friends, let us say, of your principal persons, you must be excessive, extravagant, fantastic even, in expression; and you must be this, more extravagantly, more excessively, more fantastically than ever, if you wish to show character and passion as they would be known to the principal person of your play in the depths of his own mind. The greatest art symbolises not those things that we have

observed so much as those things that we have experienced, and when the imaginary saint or lover or hero moves us most deeply, it is the moment when he awakens within us for an instant our own heroism, our own sanctity, our own desire. We possess these things—the greatest of men not more than Seaghan the Fool—not at all moderately, but to an infinite extent, and though we control or ignore them, we know that the moralists speak true when they compare them to angels or to devils, or to beasts of prey. How can any dramatic art, moderate in expression, be a true image of hell or heaven or the wilderness, or do anything but create those faint histories that but touch our curiosity, those groups of persons that never follow us into our intimate life, where Odysseus and Don Quixote and Hamlet are with us always?

The scientific movement is ebbing a little everywhere, and here in Ireland it has never been in flood at all. And I am certain that everywhere literature will return once more to its old extravagant fantastical expression, for in literature, unlike science, there are no discoveries, and it is always the old that returns. Everything in Ireland urges us to this return, and it may be that we shall be the first to recover after the fifty years of mistake.

The antagonist of imaginative writing in Ireland is not a habit of scientific observation but our interest in matters of opinion. A misgoverned country seeking a remedy by agitation puts an especial value upon opinion, and even those who are not conscious of any interest in the country are influenced by the general habit. All fine literature is the disinterested contemplation or expression of life, but hardly any Irish writer can liberate his mind sufficiently from questions of practical reform for this contemplation. Art for art's sake, as he understands it, whether it be the art of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* or of the imaginer of Falstaff, seems to him a neglect of public duty. It is as though the telegraph-boys botanised among the hedges with the undelivered envelopes in their pockets; a man must calculate the effect of his words before he writes them, whom they are to excite and to what end. We all write if we follow the habit of the country not for our own delight but for the improvement of our neighbours, and this is not only true of such obviously propagandist work as *The Spirit of the Nation* or a Gaelic League play, but of the work of writers who seemed to have escaped from every national influence, like Mr. Bernard Shaw, Mr. George Moore, or even Mr. Oscar Wilde. They never keep their heads

for very long out of the flood of opinion. Mr. Bernard Shaw, the one brilliant writer of comedy in England to-day, makes his comedies something less than life by never forgetting that he is a reformer, and Mr. Wilde could hardly finish an act of a play without denouncing the British public; and Mr. Moore—God bless the hearers!—has not for ten years now been able to keep himself from the praise or blame of the Church of his fathers. Goethe, whose mind was more busy with philosophy than any modern poet, has said, 'The poet needs all philosophy, but he must keep it out of his work.' One remembers Dante, and wishes that Goethe had left some commentary upon that saying, some definition of philosophy perhaps; but one cannot be less than certain that the poet, though it may be well for him to have right opinions, above all if his country be at death's door, must keep all opinion that he holds to merely because he thinks it right, out of his poetry, if it is to be poetry at all. At the enquiry which preceded the granting of a patent to the Abbey Theatre I was asked if *Cathleen ni Houlihan* was not written to affect opinion. Certainly it was not. I had a dream one night which gave me a story, and I had certain emotions about this country, and I gave those emotions expression for my own pleasure. If I had

written to convince others I would have asked myself, not 'Is that exactly what I think and feel?' but 'How would that strike so-and-so? How will they think and feel when they have read it?' And all would be oratorical and insincere. If we understand our own minds, and the things that are striving to utter themselves through our minds, we move others, not because we have understood or thought about those others, but because all life has the same root. Coventry Patmore has said, 'The end of art is peace,' and the following of art is little different from the following of religion in the intense preoccupation that it demands. Somebody has said, 'God asks nothing of the highest soul except attention'; and so necessary is attention to mastery in any art, that there are moments when we think that nothing else is necessary, and nothing else so difficult. The religious life has created for itself monasteries and convents where men and women may forget in prayer and contemplation everything that seems necessary to the most useful and busy citizens of their towns and villages, and one imagines that even in the monastery and the convent there are passing things, the twitter of a sparrow in the window, the memory of some old quarrel, things lighter than air, that keep the soul from its joy. How many of

those old religious sayings can one not apply to the life of art? 'The Holy Spirit,' wrote St. Thomas à Kempis, 'has liberated me from a multitude of opinions.' When one sets out to cast into some mould so much of life merely for life's sake, one is tempted at every moment to twist it from its eternal shape to help some friend or harm some enemy. Alas! all men, we in Ireland more than others, are fighters, and it is a hard law that compels us to cast away our swords when we enter the house of the Muses, as men cast them away at the doors of the banqueting-hall at Tara. A weekly paper, in reviewing last year's *Samhain,* convinced itself, or at any rate its readers—for that is the heart of the business in propaganda —that I only began to say these things a few months ago under I know not what alien influence; and yet I seem to have been saying them all my life. I took up an anthology of Irish verse that I edited some ten years ago, and I found them there, and I think they were a chief part of an old fight over the policy of the New Irish Library. Till they are accepted by writers and readers in this country it will never have a literature, it will never escape from the election rhyme and the pamphlet. So long as I have any control over the National Theatre Society it will be carried on in this spirit, call it

art for art's sake if you will; and no plays will be produced at it which were written, not for the sake of a good story or fine verses or some revelation of character, but to please those friends of ours who are ever urging us to attack the priests or the English, or wanting us to put our imagination into handcuffs that we may be sure of never seeming to do one or the other.

I have had very little to say this year in *Samhain,* and I have said it badly. When I wrote *Ideas of Good and Evil* and *Celtic Twilight,* I wrote everything very slowly and a great many times over. A few years ago, however, my eyesight got so bad that I had to dictate the first drafts of everything, and then rewrite these drafts several times. I did the last *Samhain* this way, dictating all the thoughts in a few days, and rewriting them in two or three weeks; but this time I am letting the first draft remain with all its carelessness of phrase and rhythm. I am busy with a practical project which needs the saying of many things from time to time, and it is better to say them carelessly and harshly than to take time from my poetry. One casts something away every year, and I shall, I think, have to cast away the hope of ever having a prose style that amounts to anything.

1906

LITERATURE AND THE LIVING VOICE[1]

I

One Sunday, in summer, a few years ago, I went to the little village of Killeenan, that is not many miles from Galway, to do honour to the memory of Raftery, a Gaelic poet who died a little before the famine. A headstone had been put over his grave in the half-ruined churchyard, and a priest had come to bless it, and many country people to listen to his poems. After the shawled and frieze-coated people had knelt down and prayed for the repose of his soul, they gathered about a little wooden platform that had been put up in a field. I do not remember whether Raftery's poem about

[1] This essay was written immediately after the opening of the Abbey Theatre, though it was not printed, through an accident, until the art of the Abbey had become an art of peasant comedy. It tells of things we have never had the time to begin. We still dream of them.—W. B. Y., March 1908.

himself was one of those they listened to, but certainly it was in the thoughts of many, and it was the image reflected in that poem that had drawn some of them from distant villages.

I am Raftery the poet,
Full of hope and love;
With eyes without light;
With gentleness without misery.

Going west on my journey
With the light of my heart;
Weak and tired
To the end of my road.

I am now
And my back to a wall,
Playing music
To empty pockets.

Some few there remembered him, and one old man came out among the reciters to tell of the burying, where he himself, a young boy at the time, had carried a candle.

The verses of other Gaelic poets were sung or recited too, and, although certainly not often fine poetry, they had its spirit, its *naïveté*—that is to say, its way of looking at the world as if it were but an hour old—its seriousness even in laughter, its personal rhythm.

A few days after I was in the town of Galway, and saw there, as I had often seen in other country towns, some young men

marching down the middle of a street singing an already outworn London music-hall song, that filled the memory, long after they had gone by, with a rhythm as pronounced and as impersonal as the noise of a machine. In the shop windows there were, I knew, the signs of a life very unlike that I had seen at Kilieenan: halfpenny comic papers and story papers, sixpenny reprints of popular novels, and with the exception of a dusty Dumas or Scott strayed thither, one knew not how, and one or two little books of Irish ballads, nothing that one calls literature, nothing that would interest the few thousands who alone out of many millions have what we call culture. A few miles had divided the sixteenth century, with its equality of culture, of good taste, from the twentieth, where if a man has fine taste he has either been born to leisure and opportunity or has in him an energy that is genius. One saw the difference in the clothes of the people of the town and of the village, for, as the Emerald Tablet says, outward and inner things answer to one another. The village men wore their bawneens, their white flannel jackets; they had clothes that had a little memory of clothes that had once been adapted to their calling by centuries of continual slight changes. They were sometimes well dressed,

for they suggested nothing but themselves and wore little that had suited another better. But in the town nobody was well dressed; for in modern life, only a few people—some few thousands—set the fashion, and set it to please themselves and to fit their lives; and as for the rest, they must go shabby—the ploughman in clothes cut for a life of leisure, but made of shoddy, and the tramp in the ploughman's cast-off clothes, and the scarecrow in the tramp's battered coat and broken hat.

II

All that love the arts or love dignity in life have at one time or another noticed these things, and some have wondered why the world has for some three or four centuries sacrificed so much, and with what seems a growing recklessness, to create an intellectual aristocracy, a leisured class—to set apart, and above all others, a number of men and women who are not very well pleased with one another or the world they have to live in. It is some comparison, like this that I have made, which has been the origin, as I think, of most attempts to revive some old language in which the general business of the world is no longer transacted. The Provençal movement, the Welsh, the

Czech, have all, I think, been attempting, when we examine them to the heart, to restore what is called a more picturesque way of life—that is to say, a way of life in which the common man has some share in imaginative art. That this is the decisive element in the attempt to revive and to preserve the Irish language I am very certain. A language enthusiast does not put it that way to himself; he says, rather, 'If I can make the people talk Irish again they will be the less English'; but if you talk to him till you have hunted the words into their burrow you will find that the word 'Ireland' means to him a form of life delightful to his imagination, and that the word 'England' suggests to him a cold, joyless, irreligious and ugly life. The life of the villages, with its songs, its dances and its pious greetings, its conversations full of vivid images shaped hardly more by life itself than by innumerable forgotten poets, all that life of good nature and improvisation grows more noble as he meditates upon it, for it mingles with the middle ages until he no longer can see it as it is but as it was, when it ran, as it were, into a point of fire in the courtliness of king's houses. He hardly knows whether what stirred him yesterday was that old fiddler, playing an almost-forgotten music on a fiddle mended with twine, or a sudden

thought of some king that was of the blood of that old man, some O'Loughlin or O'Bryne, listening amid his soldiers, he and they at the one table, they too, lucky, bright-eyed, while the minstrel sang of angry Cuchulain, or of him men called 'Golden salmon of the sea, clean hawk of the air.' It will not please him, however, if you tell him that he is fighting the modern world, which he calls 'England,' as Mistral and his fellows called it Paris, and that he will need more than language if he is to make the monster turn up its white belly. And yet the difference between what the word England means and all that the word Gaelic suggests is greater than any that could have been before the imagination of Mistral. Ireland, her imagination at its noon before the birth of Chaucer, has created the most beautiful literature of a whole people that has been anywhere since Greece and Rome, while English literature, the greatest of all literatures but that of Greece, is yet the literature of a few. Nothing of it but a handful of ballads about Robin Hood has come from the folk or belongs to them rightly, for the good English writers, with a few exceptions that seem accidental, have written for a small cultivated class; and is not this the reason? Irish poetry and Irish stories were made to be spoken or sung, while English literature.

alone of great literatures, because the newest of them all, has all but completely shaped itself in the printing-press. In Ireland to-day the old world that sang and listened is, it may be for the last time in Europe, face to face with the world that reads and writes, and their antagonism is always present under some name or other in Irish imagination and intellect. I myself cannot be convinced that the printing-press will be always victor, for change is inconceivably swift, and when it begins—well, as the proverb has it, everything comes in at the hole. The world soon tires of its toys, and our exaggerated love of print and paper seems to me to come out of passing conditions and to be no more a part of the final constitution of things than the craving of a woman in child-bed for green apples. When a man takes a book into the corner, he surrenders so much life for his knowledge, so much, I mean, of that normal activity that gives him life and strength; he lays away his own handiwork and turns from his friend, and if the book is good he is at some pains to press all the little wanderings and tumults of the mind into silence and quiet. If the reader be poor, if he has worked all day at the plough or the desk, he will hardly have strength enough for any but a meretricious book; nor is it only when

the book is on the knees that his own life must be given for it. For a good and sincere book needs the preparation of the peculiar studies and reveries that prepare for good taste, and make it easier for the mind to find pleasure in a new landscape; and all these reveries and studies have need of so much time and thought that it is almost certain a man cannot be a successful doctor, or engineer, or Cabinet Minister, and have a culture good enough to escape the mockery of the ragged art student who comes of an evening sometimes to borrow a half-sovereign. The old culture came to a man at his work; it was not at the expense of life, but an exaltation of life itself; it came in at the eyes as some civic ceremony sailed along the streets, or as we arrayed ourselves before the looking-glass; or it came in at the ears in a song as we bent over the plough or the anvil, or at that great table where rich and poor sat down together and heard the minstrel bidding them pass around the wine-cup and say a prayer for Gawain[1] dead. Certainly it came without a price; it did not take one from one's friends and one's handiwork; but it was like a good woman who gives all for love and is never jealous and is ready to do all the talking when we are tired.

[1] No, it was some other knight of the table.—W. B. Y., 1923.

How the old is to come again, how the other side of the penny is to come up, how the spit is to turn the other side of the meat to the fire, I do not know, but that the time will come I am certain. When one kind of desire has been satisfied for a long time it becomes sleepy, and other kinds, long quiet, after making a noise begin to order life. Of the many things, desires or powers or instruments, that are to change the world, the artist is fitted to understand but two or three, and the less he troubles himself about the complexity that is outside his craft, the more will he find it all within his craft, and the more dexterous will his hand and his thought become. I am trying to see nothing in the world but the arts, and nothing in this change—which one cannot prove but only foretell—but the share my own art will have in it.

III

One thing is entirely certain. Wherever the old imaginative life lingers it must be stirred into life, and kept alive, and in Ireland this is the work, it may be, of the Gaelic movement. But the nineteenth century, with its moral zeal, its insistence upon irrelevant interests, having passed over, the artist can admit that he cares about nothing that does

not give him a new subject or a new technique. Propaganda would be for him a dissipation, but he may compare his art, if he has a mind to, with the arts that belonged to a whole people, and discover, not how to imitate the external form of an epic or a folk-song, but how to express in some equivalent form whatever in the thoughts of his own age seem, as it were, to press into the future. The most obvious difference is that when literature belonged to a whole people, its three great forms, narrative, lyrical, and dramatic, found their way to men's minds without the mediation of print and paper. That narrative poetry may find its minstrels again, and lyrical poetry adequate singers, and dramatic poetry adequate players, he must spend much of his time with these three lost arts, and the more technical is his interest the better. When I first began working in Ireland at what some newspaper has called the Celtic Renaissance, I saw that we had still even in English a sufficient audience for song and speech. Certain of our young men and women, too restless and sociable to be readers, had amongst them an interest in Irish legend and history, and years of imaginative politics had kept them from forgetting, as most modern people have, how to listen to serious words. I always

saw that some kind of theatre would be a natural centre for a tradition of feeling and thought, but that it must—and this was its chief opportunity—appeal to the interest appealed to by lively conversation or by oratory. In other words, that it must be made for young people who were sufficiently ignorant to refuse a pound of flesh even though the Nine Worthies offered their wisdom in return. They are not, perhaps, very numerous, for they do not include the thousands of conquered spirits who in Dublin, as elsewhere, go to see *The Girl from Kay's,* or when Mr. Tree is upon tour, *The Girl from Prospero's Island;* and the peasant in Ireland, as elsewhere, has not taken to the theatre, and can, I think, be moved through Gaelic only.

If one could get them, I thought, one could draw to oneself the apathetic people who are in every country, and people who don't know what they like till somebody tells them. Now, a friend has given me that theatre. It is not very big, but it is quite big enough to seat those few thousands and their friends in a seven days' run of a new play; and I have begun my real business. I have to find once again singers, minstrels, and players who love words more than any other thing under heaven, for without fine words there is no literature.

IV

I will say but a little of dramatic technique, as I would have it in this theatre of speech, of romance, of extravagance, for I have written of all that so many times. In every art, when we consider that it has need of a renewing of life, we go backward till we light upon a time when it was nearer to human life and instinct, before it had gathered about it so many mechanical specialisations and traditions. We examine that earlier condition and think out its principles of life that we may be able to separate accidental from vital things. William Morris, for instance, studied the earliest printing, the founts of type that were made when men saw their craft with eyes that were still new, and with leisure, and without the restraints of commerce and custom. And then he made a type that was really new, that had the quality of his own mind about it, though it reminds one of its ancestry, of its high breeding as it were. Coleridge and Wordsworth were influenced by the publication of Percy's *Reliques* to the making of a simplicity altogether unlike that of old ballad-writers. Rossetti went to early Italian painting, to Holy Families and choirs of angels, that he might learn how to express an emotion that had its roots in sexual desire

and in the delight of his generation in fine clothes and in beautiful rooms. Nor is it otherwise with the reformers of churches and of the social order, for reform must justify itself by a return in feeling to something that our fathers have told us in the old time.

So it is with us. Inspired by players who played before a figured curtain, we have made scenery, indeed, but scenery that is little more than a suggestion—a pattern with recurring boughs and leaves of gold for a wood, a great green curtain with a red stencil upon it to carry the eye upward for a palace, and so on. More important than these, we have looked for the centre of our art where the players of the time of Shakespeare and of Corneille found theirs—in speech, whether it be the perfect mimicry of the conversation of two countrymen of the roads, or that idealised speech poets have imagined for what we think but do not say. Before men read, the ear and the tongue were subtle, and delighted one another with the little tunes that were in words; every word would have its own tune, though but one main note may have been marked enough for us to name it. They loved language, and all literature was then, whether in the mouth of minstrels, players, or singers, but the perfection of an art that everybody practised, a flower out of the

stem of life. And language continually renewed itself in that perfection, returning to daily life out of that finer leisure, strengthened and sweetened as from a retreat ordered by religion. The ordinary dramatic critic, when you tell him that a play, if it is to be of a great kind, must have beautiful words, will answer that you have misunderstood the nature of the stage and are asking of it what books should give. Sometimes when some excellent man, a playgoer certainly and sometimes a critic, has read me a passage out of some poet, I have been set wondering what books of poetry can mean to the greater number of men. If they are to read poetry at all, if they are to enjoy beautiful rhythm, if they are to get from poetry anything but what it has in common with prose, they must hear it spoken by men who have music in their voices and a learned understanding of its sound. There is no poem so great that a fine speaker cannot make it greater or that a bad ear cannot make it nothing. All the arts when young and happy are but the point of the spear whose handle is our daily life. When they grow old and unhappy they perfect themselves away from life, and life, seeing that they are sufficient to themselves, forgets them. The fruit of the tree that was in Eden grows out of a flower full

of scent, rounds and ripens, until at last the little stem, that brought to it the sap out of the tree, dries up and breaks, and the fruit rots upon the ground.

The theatre grows more elaborate, developing the player at the expense of the poet, developing the scenery at the expense of the player, always increasing the importance of whatever has come to it out of the mere mechanism of a building or the interests of a class, specialising more and more, doing whatever is easiest rather than what is most noble, and shaping imaginations before the footlights as behind, that are stirred to excitements that belong to it and not to life; until at last life, which knows that a specialised energy is not herself, turns to other things, content to leave it to weaklings and triflers, to those in whose body there is the least quantity of herself.

V

But if we are to delight our three or four thousand young men and women with a delight that will follow them into their own houses, and if we are to add the countryman to their number, we shall need more than the play, we shall need those other spoken arts. The player rose into importance in the town, but the minstrel is of the country. We must have narrative as well

as dramatic poetry, and we are making room for it in the theatre in the first instance, but in this also we must go to an earlier time. Modern recitation is not, like modern theatrical art, an over-elaboration of a true art, but an entire misunderstanding. It has no tradition at all. It is an endeavour to do what can only be done well by the player. It has no relation of its own to life. Some young man in evening clothes will recite to you *The Dream of Eugene Aram,* and it will be laughable, grotesque and a little vulgar. Tragic emotions that need scenic illusion, a long preparation, a gradual heightening of emotion, are thrust into the middle of our common affairs. That they may be as extravagant, as little tempered by anything ideal or distant as possible, he will break up the rhythm, regarding neither the length of the lines nor the natural music of the phrases, and distort the accent by every casual impulse. He will gesticulate wildly, adapting his movements to the drama as if Eugene Aram were in the room before us, and all the time we see a young man in evening dress who has become unaccountably insane. Nothing that he can do or say will make us forget that he is Mr. Robinson the bank clerk, and that the toes of his boots turn upward. We have nothing to learn here. We must go to the villages

or we must go back hundreds of years to Wolfram of Eschenbach and the castles of Thuringia. In this, as in all other arts, one finds its law and its true purpose when one is near the source. The minstrel never dramatised anybody but himself. It was impossible, from the nature of the words the poet had put into his mouth, or that he had made for himself, that he should speak as another person. He will go no nearer to drama than we do in daily speech, and he will not allow you for any long time to forget himself. Our own Raftery will stop the tale to cry, 'This is what I, Raftery, wrote down in the book of the people'; or, 'I, myself, Raftery, went to bed without supper that night.' Or, if it is Wolfram, and the tale is of Gawain or Parzival, he will tell the listening ladies that he sings of happy love out of his own unhappy love, or he will interrupt the story of a siege and its hardships to remember his own house, where there is not enough food for the mice. He knows how to keep himself interesting that his words may have weight—so many lines of narrative, and then a phrase about himself and his emotions. The reciter cannot be a player, for that is a different art; but he must be a messenger, and he should be as interesting, as exciting, as are all that carry great news. He comes from far off,

and he speaks of far-off things with his own peculiar animation, and instead of lessening the ideal and beautiful elements of speech he may, if he has a mind to, increase them. He may speak to actual notes as a singer does if they are so simple that he never loses the speaking-voice, and if the poem is long he must do so, or his own voice will become weary and formless. His art is nearer to pattern than that of the player. It is always allusion, never illusion; for what he tells of, no matter how impassioned he may become, is always distant, and for this reason he may permit himself every kind of nobleness. In a short poem he may interrupt the narrative with a burden, which the audience will soon learn to sing, and this burden, because it is repeated and need not tell a story to a first hearing, can have a more elaborate musical notation, can go nearer to ordinary song. Gradually other devices will occur to him—effects of loudness and softness, of increasing and decreasing speed, certain rhythmic movements of his body, a score of forgotten things, for the art of speech is lost, and when we begin at it every day is a discovery. The reciter must be made exciting and wonderful in himself, apart from what he has to tell, and that is more difficult than it was in the middle ages. We are not

mysterious to one another; we can come from far off and yet be no better than our neighbours. We are no longer like those Egyptian birds that flew out of Arabia, their claws full of spices; nor can we, like an ancient or mediæval poet, throw into our verses the emotions and events of our lives, or even dramatise, as they could, the life of the minstrel into whose mouth we are to put our words. I can think of nothing better than to borrow from the tellers of old tales, who will often pretend to have been at the wedding of the princess or afterwards 'when they were throwing out children by the basketful,' and to give the story-teller definite fictitious personality and find for him an appropriate costume. Many costumes and persons come into my imagination. I imagine an old countryman upon the stage of the theatre or in some little country court-house where a Gaelic society is meeting, and I can hear him say that he is Raftery or a brother, and that he has tramped through France and Spain and the whole world. He has seen everything, and he has all country love-tales at his finger-tips. I can imagine, too—and now the story-teller is more serious and more naked of country circumstance—a jester with black cockscomb and black clothes. He has been in the faery hills; perhaps he is the terrible *Amadan-na-Breena*

himself; or he has been so long in the world that he can tell of ancient battles. It is not as good as what we have lost, but we cannot hope to see in our time, except by some rare accident, the minstrel who differs from his audience in nothing but the exaltation of his mood, and who is yet as exciting and as romantic in their eyes as were Raftery and Wolfram to their people.

It is perhaps nearly impossible to make recitation a living thing, for there is no existing taste we can appeal to; but it should not be hard here in Ireland to interest people in songs that are made for the word's sake and not for the music, or for that only in a secondary degree. They are interested in such songs already, only the songs have little subtilty of thought and of language. One does not find in them that richness of emotion which but seems modern because it has been brought so very lately out of the cellar. At their best they are the songs of children and of country people, eternally young for all their centuries, and yet not even in old days, as one thinks, a vintage for kings' houses. We require a method of setting to music that will make it possible to sing or to speak to notes a poem like Rossetti's translation of *The Ballad of Dead Ladies* in such a fashion that no word shall have an intonation or accentuation it

could not have in passionate speech. It must be set for the speaking-voice, like the songs that sailors make up or remember, and a man at the far end of the room must be able to take it down on a first hearing. An English musical paper said the other day, in commenting on something I had written, 'Owing to musical necessities, vowels must be lengthened in singing to an extent which in speech would be ludicrous if not absolutely impossible.' I have but one art, that of speech, and my feeling for music dissociated from speech is very slight, and listening as I do to the words with the better part of my attention, there is no modern song sung in the modern way that is not to my taste 'ludicrous' and 'impossible.' I hear with older ears than the musician, and the songs of country people and of sailors delight me. I wonder why the musician is not content to set to music some arrangement of meaningless liquid vowels, and thereby to make his song like that of the birds; but I do not judge his art for any purpose but my own.[1] It is worthless for my purpose certainly,

[1] I have heard musicians excuse themselves by claiming that they put the words there for the sake of the singer; but if that be so, why should not the singer sing something she may wish to have by rote? Nobody will hear the words; and the local time-table, or, so much suet and so many raisins, and so much spice and so much sugar, and whether it is to be put in a quick or a slow oven, would run very nicely with a little management.

and it is one of the causes that are bringing about in modern countries a degradation of language. I have to find men with more music than I have, who will develop to a finer subtilty the singing of the cottage and the forecastle, and develop it more on the side of speech than that of music, until it has become intellectual and nervous enough to be the vehicle of a Shelley or a Keats. For some purposes it will be necessary to divine the lineaments of a still older art, and re-create the regulated declamations that died out when music fell into its earliest elaborations. Miss Farr has divined enough of this older art, of which no fragment has come down to us—for even the music of *Aucassin and Nicolette,* with its definite tune, its recurring pattern of sound, is something more than declamation—to make the chorus of *Hippolytus* and of the *Trojan Women,* at the Court Theatre or the Lyric, intelligible speech, even when several voices spoke together. She used very often definite melodies of a very simple kind, but always when the thought became intricate and the measure grave and slow, fell back upon declamation regulated by notes. Her experiments have included almost every kind of verse, and every possible elaboration of sound compatible with the supremacy of the words. I do not think Homer is ever

so moving as when she recites him to a little tune played on a stringed instrument not very unlike a lyre. She began at my suggestion with songs in plays, for it was clearly an absurd thing that words necessary to one's understanding of the action, either because they explained some character, or because they carried some emotion to its highest intensity, should be less intelligible than the bustling and ruder words of the dialogue. We have tried our art, since we first tried it in a theatre, upon many kinds of audiences, and have found that ordinary men and women take pleasure in it and sometimes say that they never understood poetry before. It is, however, more difficult to move those—fortunately for our purpose but a few—whose ears are accustomed to the abstract emotion and elaboration of notes in modern music.

VI

If we accomplish this great work, if we make it possible again for the poet to express himself, not merely through words, but through the voices of singers, of minstrels, of players, we shall certainly have changed the substance and the manner of our poetry. Every one who has to interest his audience through the voice discovers that his success

depends upon the clear, simple and varied structure of his thought. I have written a good many plays in verse and prose, and almost all those plays I have rewritten after performance, sometimes again and again, and every re-writing that has succeeded upon the stage has been an addition to the masculine element, an increase of strength in the bony structure.

Modern literature, above all poetical literature, is monotonous in its structure and effeminate in its continual insistence upon certain moments of strained lyricism. William Morris, who did more than any modern to recover mediæval art, did not in his *Earthly Paradise* copy from Chaucer, from whom he copied so much that was *naïve* and beautiful, what seems to me essential in Chaucer's art. He thought of himself as writing for the reader, who could return to him again and again when the chosen mood had come, and became monotonous, melancholy, too continually lyrical in his understanding of emotion and of life. Had he accustomed himself to read out his poems upon those Sunday evenings that he gave to Socialist speeches, and to gather an audience of average men, precisely such an audience as I have often seen in his house, he would have been forced to Chaucer's variety, to his delight in the height and

depth, and would have found expression for that humorous, many-sided nature of his. I owe to him many truths, but I would add to those truths the certainty that all the old writers, the masculine writers of the world, wrote to be spoken or to be sung, and in a later age to be read aloud, for hearers who had to understand swiftly or not at all, and who gave up nothing of life to listen, but sat, the day's work over, friend by friend, lover by lover.

THE ARROW: 1906[1]

THE SEASON'S WORK

A CHARACTER of the winter's work will be the large number of romantic, poetic and historical plays—that is to say, of plays which require a convention for their performance; their speech, whether it be verse or prose, being so heightened as to transcend that of any form of real life. Our first two years of the Abbey Theatre have been expended mostly on the perfecting of the Company in peasant comedy and tragedy. Every national dramatic movement or theatre in countries like Bohemia and Hungary, as in Elizabethan England, has arisen out of a study of the common people, who preserve national characteristics more than any other class, and out of an imaginative re-creation of national history or legend. The life of the drawing-room, the life represented in most plays of the ordinary theatre of to-day, differs but little all over the world,

[1] *The Arrow,* a briefer chronicle than *Samhain,* was distributed with the programme for a few months.

and has as little to do with the national spirit as the architecture of, let us say, St. Stephen's Green, or Queen's Gate, or of the Boulevards about the Arc de Triomphe.

As we wish our work to be full of the life of this country, our stage-manager has almost always to train our actors from the beginning, always so in the case of peasant plays, and this makes the building up of a theatre like ours the work of years. We are now fairly satisfied with the representation of peasant life, and we can afford to give the greater part of our attention to other expressions of our art and of our life. The romantic work and poetical work once reasonably good, we can, if but the dramatist arrive, take up the life of our drawing-rooms, and see if there is something characteristic there, something which our nationality may enable us to express better than others, and so create plays of that life and means to play them as truthfully as a play of Hauptmann's or of Ibsen's upon the German or Scandinavian stage. I am not myself interested in this kind of work, and do not believe it to be as important as contemporary critics think it is, but a theatre such as we project should give a reasonably complete expression to the imaginative interests of its country. In any case it was easier, and therefore wiser, to begin where our art is

most unlike that of others, with the representation of country life.

It is possible to speak the universal truths of human nature whether the speakers be peasants or wealthy men, for—

> Love doth sing
> As sweetly in a beggar as a king.

So far as we have any model before us it is the national and municipal theatres in various Continental towns, and, like the best of these, we must have in our repertory masterpieces from every great school of dramatic literature, and play them confidently, even though the public be slow to like that old stern art, and perhaps a little proudly, remembering that no other English-speaking theatre can be so catholic. Certainly the weathercocks of our imagination will not turn those painted eyes of theirs too long to the quarter of the Scandinavian winds. If the wind blow long from the Mediterranean, the paint may peel before we pray for a change in the weather.

THE CONTROVERSY OVER *THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD*

We have claimed for our writers the freedom to find in their own land every expression of good and evil necessary to their art, for Irish life contains, like all vigorous life, the seeds of all good and evil, and a writer must be free here as elsewhere to watch where weed or flower ripens. No one who knows the work of our Theatre as a whole can say we have neglected the flower; but the moment a writer is forbidden to take pleasure in the weed, his art loses energy and abundance. In the great days of English dramatic art the greatest English writer of comedy was free to create *The Alchemist* and *Volpone,* but a demand born of Puritan conviction and shopkeeping timidity and insincerity, for what many second-rate intellects thought to be noble and elevating events and characters, had already at the outset of the eighteenth century ended the English drama as a complete and serious art. Sheri-

dan and Goldsmith, when they restored comedy after an epoch of sentimentalities, had to apologise for their satiric genius by scenes of conventional love-making and sentimental domesticity that have set them outside the company of all, whether their genius be great or little, whose work is pure and whole. The quarrel of our Theatre to-day is the quarrel of the Theatre in many lands; for the old Puritanism, the old dislike of power and reality have not changed, even when they are called by some Gaelic name.

[On the second performance of *The Playboy of the Western World,* about forty men who sat in the middle of the pit succeeded in making the play entirely inaudible. Some of them brought tin-trumpets, and the noise began immediately on the rise of the curtain. For days articles in the Press called for the withdrawal of the play, but we played for the seven nights we had announced; and before the week's end opinion had turned in our favour. There were, however, nightly disturbances and a good deal of rioting in the surrounding streets. On the last night of the play there were, I believe, five hundred police keeping order in the theatre and in its neighbourhood. Some days later our enemies, though beaten so far as the play was concerned, crowded into the cheaper seats for a debate on the freedom of the stage. They were very excited, and kept up the discussion until near twelve. The last paragraphs of my opening statement ran as follows.]

From Mr. Yeats' opening Speech in the Debate on February 4, 1907, *at the Abbey Theatre.*

The struggle of the last week has been long a necessity; various paragraphs in newspapers describing Irish attacks on Theatres had made many worthy young men come to think that the silencing of a stage at their own pleasure, even if hundreds desired that is should not be silenced, might win them a little fame, and, perhaps, serve their country. Some of these attacks have been made on plays which are in themselves indefensible, vulgar and old-fashioned farces and comedies. But the attack, being an annihilation of civil rights, was never anything but an increase of Irish disorder. The last I heard of was in Liverpool, and there a stage was rushed, and a priest, who had set a play upon it, withdrew his play and apologised to the audience. We have not such pliant bones, and did not learn in the houses that bred us a so suppliant knee. But behind the excitement of example there is a more fundamental movement of opinion. Some seven or eight years ago the National movement was democratised and passed from the hands of a few leaders into those of large numbers of young men organised in clubs and societies. These young men

made the mistake of the newly-enfranchised everywhere; they fought for causes worthy in themselves with the unworthy instruments of tyranny and violence. Comic songs of a certain kind were to be driven from the stage, every one was to wear Irish cloth, every one was to learn Irish, every one was to hold certain opinions, and these ends were sought by personal attacks, by virulent caricature and violent derision. It needs eloquence to persuade and knowledge to expound; but the coarser means come ready to every man's hand, as ready as a stone or a stick, and where these coarse means are all, there is nothing but mob, and the commonest idea most prospers and is most sought for.

Gentlemen of the little clubs and societies, do not mistake the meaning of our victory; it means something for us, but more for you. When the curtain of *The Playboy* fell on Saturday night in the midst of what *The Sunday Independent*—no friendly witness—described as 'thunders of applause,' I am confident that I saw the rise in this country of a new thought, a new opinion, that we had long needed. It was not all approval of Mr. Synge's play that sent the receipts of the Abbey Theatre this last week to twice the height they had ever touched before. The generation of young men and

girls who are now leaving schools or colleges are weary of the tyranny of clubs and leagues. They wish again for individual sincerity, the eternal quest of truth, all that has been given up for so long that all might crouch upon the one roost and quack or cry in the one flock. We are beginning once again to ask what a man is, and to be content to wait a little before we go on to that further question: What is a good Irishman? There are some who have not yet their degrees that will say to friend or neighbour, 'You have voted with the English, and that is bad'; or 'You have sent away your Irish servants, or thrown away your Irish clothes, or blacked your face for your singing. I despise what you have done, I keep you still my friend; but if you are terrorised out of doing any of these things, evil things though I know them to be, I will not have you for my friend any more.' Manhood is all, and the root of manhood is courage and courtesy.

1907

ON TAKING *THE PLAYBOY* TO LONDON

THE failure of the audience to understand this powerful and strange work (*The Playboy of the Western World*) has been the one serious failure of our movement, and it could not have happened but that the greater number of those who came to shout down the play were no regular part of our audience at all, but members of parties and societies whose main interests are political. We have been denounced with even greater violence than on the first production of the play for announcing that we should carry it to London. We cannot see that an attack, which we believe to have been founded on a misunderstanding of the nature of literature, should prevent us from selecting, as our custom is, whatever of our best comes within the compass of our players at the time, to show in some English theatres. Nearly all strong and strange writing is attacked on its appearance, and those who press it upon the world may not

cease from pressing it, for their justification is its ultimate acceptance. Ireland is passing through a crisis in the life of the mind greater than any she has known since the rise of the Young Ireland party, and based upon a principle which sets many in opposition to the habits of thought and feeling come down from that party, for the seasons change, and need and occupation with them. Many are beginning to recognise the right of the individual mind to see the world in its own way, to cherish the thoughts which separate men from one another, and that are the creators of distinguished life, instead of those thoughts that had made one man like another if they could, and have but succeeded in setting hysteria and insincerity in place of confidence and self-possession. To the Young Ireland writers, who have still the ear of Ireland, though not its distracted mind, truth was historical and external and not a self-consistent personal vision, and it is but according to ancient custom that the new truth should force its way amid riot and great anger.

A PEOPLE'S THEATRE[1]

A LETTER TO LADY GREGORY

I

My dear Lady Gregory—Of recent years you have done all that is anxious and laborious in the supervision of the Abbey Theatre and left me free to follow my own thoughts. It is therefore right that I address to you this letter, wherein I shall explain, half for your ears, half for other ears, certain thoughts that have made me believe that the Abbey Theatre can never do all we had hoped. We set out to make a 'People's Theatre,' and in that we have succeeded. But I did not know until very lately that there are certain things, dear to both our hearts, which no 'People's Theatre' can accomplish.

[1] I took the title from a book by Romain Rolland on some French theatrical experiments. 'A People's Theatre' is not quite the same thing as 'A Popular Theatre.' The essay was published in *The Irish Statesman* in the autumn of 1919.—W. B. Y., 1923.

II

All exploitation of the life of the wealthy, for the eye and the ear of the poor and half poor, in plays, in popular novels, in musical comedy, in fashion papers, at the cinema, in *Daily Mirror* photographs, is a travesty of the life of the rich; and if it were not would all but justify some red terror; and it impoverishes and vulgarises the imagination, seeming to hold up for envy and to commend a life where all is display and hurry, passion without emotion, emotion without intellect, and where there is nothing stern and solitary. The plays and novels are the least mischievous, for they still have the old-fashioned romanticism—their threepenny bit, if worn, is silver yet—but they are without intensity and intellect and cannot convey the charm of either as it may exist in those they would represent. All this exploitation is a rankness that has grown up recently among us and has come out of an historical necessity that has made the furniture and the clothes and the brains, of all but the leisured and the lettered, copies and travesties.

Shakespeare set upon the stage Kings and Queens, great historical or legendary persons about whom all was reality, except the circumstance of their lives which remain vague

and summary because—his mind and the mind of his audience being interested in emotion and intellect at their moment of union and at their greatest intensity—he could only write his best when he wrote of those who controlled the mechanism of life. Had they been controlled by it, intellect and emotion entangled by intricacy and detail could never have mounted to that union which, as Swedenborg said of the marriage of the angels, is a conflagration of the whole being. But since great crowds, changed by popular education with its eye always on some objective task, have begun to find reality in mechanism alone,[1] our popular commercial art has substituted for Lear and Cordelia the real millionaire and the real peeress, and seeks to make them charming by insisting perpetually that they have all that wealth can buy, or rather all that average men and women would buy if they had wealth. Shakespeare's groundlings watched the stage in terrified sympathy, while the British working man looks perhaps at the photographs of these lords and ladies, whom he admires beyond measure, with the pleasant feeling that they will all be robbed and murdered before he dies.

[1] I have read somewhere statistics that showed how popular education has coincided with the lessening of Shakespeare's audience. In every chief town before it began Shakespeare was constantly played.

III

Then, too, that turning into ridicule of peasant and citizen and all lesser men could but increase our delight when the great personified spiritual power, but seems unnatural when the great are but the rich. During an illness lately I read two popular novels which I had borrowed from the servants. They were good stories and half consoled me for the sleep I could not get, but I was a long time before I saw clearly why everybody with less than a thousand a year was a theme of comedy and everybody with less than five hundred a theme of farce. Even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, courtiers and doubtless great men in their world, could be but foils for Hamlet because Shakespeare had nothing to do with objective truth, but we who have nothing to do with anything else, in so far as we are of our epoch, must not allow a greater style to corrupt us.

An artisan or a small shopkeeper feels, I think, when he sees upon our Abbey stage men of his own trade, that they are represented as he himself would represent them if he had the gift of expression. I do not mean that he sees his own life expounded there without exaggeration, for exaggeration is selection and the more passionate

the art the more marked is the selection, but he does not feel that he has strayed into some other man's seat. If it is comedy he will laugh at ridiculous people, people in whose character there is some contortion, but their station of life will not seem ridiculous. The best stories I have listened to outside the Theatre have been told me by farmers or sailors when I was a boy, one or two by fellow-travellers in railway carriages, and most had some quality of romance, romance of a class and its particular capacity for adventure; and our Theatre is a people's theatre in a sense which no mere educational theatre can be, because its plays are to some extent a part of that popular imagination. It is very seldom that a man or woman bred up among the propertied or professional classes knows any class but his own, and that a class which is much the same all over the world, and already written of by so many dramatists that it is nearly impossible to see its dramatic situations with our own eyes, and those dramatic situations are perhaps exhausted—as Nietzsche thought the whole universe would be some day—and nothing left but to repeat the same combinations over again.

When the Abbey Manager sends us a play for our opinion and it is my turn to read it, if the handwriting of the MSS. or

of the author's accompanying letter suggests a leisured life I start prejudiced. There will be no fresh observation of character, I think, no sense of dialogue, all will be literary second-hand, at best what Rossetti called 'The soulless self-reflections of man's skill.' On the other hand, until the Abbey plays began themselves to be copied, a hand-writing learned in a national school always made me expect dialogue, written out by some man who had admired good dialogue before he had seen it upon paper. The construction would probably be bad, for there the student of plays has the better luck, but plays made impossible by rambling and redundance have often contained some character or some dialogue that has stayed in my memory for years. At first there was often vulgarity, and there still is in those comic love scenes which we invariably reject, and there is often propaganda with all its distortion, but these weigh light when set against life seen as if newly created. At first, in face of your mockery, I used to recommend some reading of Ibsen or Galsworthy, but no one has benefited by that reading or by anything but the Abbey audience and our own rejection of all gross propaganda and gross imitation of the comic column in the newspapers. Our dramatists, and I am not speaking of your work or

Synge's but of those to whom you and Synge and I gave an opportunity, have been excellent just in so far as they have become all eye and ear, their minds not smoking lamps, as at times they would have wished, but clear mirrors.

Our players, too, have been vivid and exciting because they have copied a life personally known to them, and of recent years, since our Manager has had to select from the ordinary stage-struck young men and women who have seen many players and perhaps no life but that of the professional class, it has been much harder, though players have matured more rapidly, to get the old, exciting, vivid playing. I have never recovered the good opinion of one recent Manager because I urged him to choose instead some young man or woman from some little shop who had never given his or her thoughts to the theatre. Put all the names into a hat, I think I said, and pick the first that comes. One of our early players was exceedingly fine in the old woman in *Riders to the Sea*. 'She has never been to Aran, she knows nothing but Dublin, surely in that part she is not objective, surely she creates from imagination,' I thought; but when I asked her she said, 'I copied from my old grandmother.' Certainly it is this objectivity, this making of all from

sympathy, from observation, never from passion, from lonely dreaming, that has made our players, at their best, great comedians, for comedy is passionless.

We have been the first to create a true 'People's Theatre,' and we have succeeded because it is not an exploitation of local colour, or of a limited form of drama possessing a temporary novelty, but the first doing of something for which the world is ripe, something that will be done all over the world and done more and more perfectly: the making articulate of all the dumb classes each with its own knowledge of the world, its own dignity, but all objective with the objectivity of the office and the workshop, of the newspaper and the street, of mechanism and of politics.

IV

Yet we did not set out to create this sort of theatre, and its success has been to me a discouragement and a defeat. Dante in that passage in the *Convito* which is, I think, the first passage of poignant autobiography in literary history, for there is nothing in St. Augustine not formal and abstract beside it, in describing his poverty and his exile counts as his chief misfortune that he has had to show himself to all Italy

and so publish his human frailties that men who honoured him unknown honour him no more. Lacking means he had lacked seclusion, and he explains that men such as he should have but few and intimate friends. His study was unity of being, the subordination of all parts to the whole as in a perfectly proportioned human body —his own definition of beauty—and not, as with those I have described, the unity of things in the world; and like all subjectives he shrank, because of what he was, because of what others were, from contact with many men. Had he written plays he would have written from his own thought and passion, observing little and using little, if at all, the conversation of his time—and whether he wrote in verse or in prose his style would have been distant, musical, metaphorical, moulded by antiquity. We stand on the margin between wilderness and wilderness, that which we observe through our senses and that which we can experience only, and our art is always the description of one or the other. If our art is mainly from experience we have need of learned speech, of agreed symbols, because all those things whose names renew experience have accompanied that experience already many times. A personage in one of Turgenev's novels is reminded by the odour of, I think,

heliotrope, of some sweetheart that had worn it, and poetry is any flower that brings a memory of emotion, while an unmemoried flower is prose, and a flower pressed and named and numbered science; but our poetical heliotrope need bring to mind no sweetheart of ours, for it suffices that it crowned the bride of Paris, or Pelius' bride. Neither poetry nor any subjective art can exist but for those who do in some measure share its traditional knowledge, a knowledge learned in leisure and contemplation. Even Burns, except in those popular verses which are as lacking in tradition, as modern, as topical, as Longfellow, was, as Henley said, not the founder but the last of a dynasty.

Once such men could draw the crowd because the circumstance of life changed slowly and there was little to disturb contemplation and so men repeated old verses and old stories, and learned and simple had come to share in common much allusion and symbol. Where the simple were ignorant they were ready to learn and so became receptive, or perhaps even to pretend knowledge like the clowns in the mediæval poem that describes the arrival of Chaucer's Pilgrims at Canterbury, who that they may seem gentlemen pretend to know the legends in the stained-glass windows. Shakespeare, more objective than Dante—for, alas, the

world must move—was still predominantly subjective, and he wrote during the latest crisis of history that made possible a Theatre of his kind. There were still among the common people many traditional songs and stories, while court and university, which were much more important to him, had an interest Chaucer never shared in great dramatic persons, in those men and women of Plutarch, who made their death a ritual of passion; for what is passion but the straining of man's being against some obstacle that obstructs its unity?

You and I and Synge, not understanding the clock, set out to bring again the Theatre of Shakespeare or rather perhaps of Sophocles. I had told you how at Young Ireland Societies and the like, young men when I was twenty had read papers to one another about Irish legend and history, and you yourself soon discovered the Gaelic League, then but a new weak thing, and taught yourself Irish. At Spiddal or near it an innkeeper had sung us Gaelic songs, all new village work that though not literature had *naïveté* and sincerity. The writers, caring nothing for cleverness, had tried to express emotion, tragic or humorous, and great masterpieces, *The Grief of a Girl's Heart,* for instance, had been written in the same speech and manner and were still sung. We know

that the songs of the Thames boatmen, to name but these, in the age of Queen Elizabeth had the same relation to great masterpieces. These Gaelic songs were as unlike as those to the songs of the Music Hall with their clever ear-catching rhythm, the work of some mind as objective as that of an inventor or of a newspaper reporter. We thought we could bring the old folk-life to Dublin, patriotic feeling to aid us, and with the folk-life all the life of the heart, understanding heart, according to Dante's definition, as the most interior being; but the modern world is more powerful than any Propaganda or even than any special circumstance, and our success has been that we have made a theatre of the head, and persuaded Dublin playgoers to think about their own trade or profession or class and their life within it, so long as the stage curtain is up, in relation to Ireland as a whole. For certain hours of an evening they have objective modern eyes.

V

The objective nature and the subjective are mixed in different proportions as are the shadowed and the bright parts in the lunar phases. In Dante there was little shadow, in Shakespeare a larger portion, while you

and Synge, it may be, resemble the moon when it has just passed its third quarter, for you have constant humour—and humour is of the shadowed part—much observation and a speech founded upon that of real life. You and he will always hold our audience, but both have used so constantly a measure of lunar light, have so elaborated style and emotion, an individual way of seeing, that neither will ever, till a classic and taught in school, find a perfect welcome.

The outcry against *The Playboy* was an outcry against its style, against its way of seeing; and when the audience called Synge 'decadent'—a favourite reproach from the objective everywhere—it was but troubled by the stench of its own burnt cakes. How could they that dreaded solitude love that which solitude had made? And never have I heard any, that laugh the loudest at your comedies, praise that musical and delicate style that makes them always a fit accompaniment for verse and sets them at times among the world's great comedies. Indeed, the louder they laugh the readier are they to rate them with the hundred ephemeral farces they have laughed at and forgotten. Synge they have at least hated. When you and Synge find such an uneasy footing, what shall I do there who have never observed anything, or listened with an attentive ear,

but value all I have seen or heard because of the emotions they call up or because of something they remind me of that exists, as I believe, beyond the world? Oh, yes, I am listened to—am I not a founder of the theatre?—and here and there scattered solitaries delight in what I have made and return to hear it again; but some young Corkman, all eyes and ears, whose first rambling play we have just pulled together or half together, can do more than that. He will be played by players who have spoken dialogue like his every night for years, and sentences that it had been a bore to read will so delight the whole house that to keep my hands from clapping I shall have to remind myself that I gave my voice for the play's production and must not applaud my own judgement.

VI

I want to create for myself an unpopular theatre and an audience like a secret society where admission is by favour and never to many. Perhaps I shall never create it, for you and I and Synge have had to dig the stone for our statue and I am aghast at the sight of a new quarry, and besides I want so much—an audience of fifty, a room worthy of it (some great dining-room or

drawing-room), half-a-dozen young men and women who can dance and speak verse or play drum and flute and zither, and all the while, instead of a profession, I but offer them 'an accomplishment.' However, there are my *Four Plays for Dancers* as a beginning, some masks by Mr. Dulac, music by Mr. Dulac and by Mr. Rummell. In most towns one can find fifty people for whom one need not build all on observation and sympathy, because they read poetry for their pleasure and understand the traditional language of passion. I desire a mysterious art, always reminding and half-reminding those who understand it of dearly loved things, doing its work by suggestion, not by direct statement, a complexity of rhythm, colour, gesture, not space-pervading like the intellect but a memory and a prophecy: a mode of drama Shelley and Keats could have used without ceasing to be themselves, and for which even Blake in the mood of *The Book of Thell* might not have been too obscure. Instead of advertisements in the press I need a hostess, and even the most accomplished hostess must choose with more than usual care, for I have noticed that city-living cultivated people, those whose names would first occur to her, set great value on painting, which is a form of property, and on music, which is a part of the organisation

of life, while the lovers of literature, those who read a book many times, either are young men with little means or live far away from big towns.

What alarms me most is how a new art needing so elaborate a technique can make its first experiments before those who, as Molière said of the courtiers of his day, have seen so much. How shall our singers and dancers be welcomed by those who have heard Chaliapin in all his parts and who know all the dances of the Russians? Yet where can I find Mr. Dulac and Mr. Rummell or any to match them, but in London [1] or in Paris, and who but the leisured will welcome an elaborate art or pay for its first experiments? In one thing the luck might be upon our side. A man who loves verse and the visible arts has, in a work such as I imagine, the advantage of the professional player. The professional player becomes the amateur, the other has been preparing all his life, and certainly I shall not soon forget the rehearsal of *The Hawk's Well,* when Mr. Ezra Pound, who had never acted on any stage, in the absence of our chief player rehearsed for half an hour. Even the forms of subjective acting that

[1] I live in Dublin now, and indolence and hatred of travel will probably compel me to make my experiment there after all.—W. B. Y., 1923.

were natural to the professional stage have ceased. Where all now is sympathy and observation no Irving can carry himself with intellectual pride, nor any Salvini in half-animal nobility, both wrapped in solitude.

I know that you consider Ireland alone our business, and in that we do not differ, except that I care very little where a play of mine is first played so that it find some natural audience and good players. My rooks may sleep abroad in the fields for a while, but when the winter come they will remember the way home to the rookery trees. Indeed, I have Ireland especially in mind, for I want to make, or to help some man some day to make, a feeling of exclusiveness, a bond among chosen spirits, a mystery almost for leisured and lettered people. Ireland has suffered more than England from democracy, for since the Wild Geese fled, who might have grown to be leaders in manners and in taste, she has had but political leaders. As a drawing is defined by its outline and taste by its rejections, I too must reject and draw an outline about the thing I seek; and say that I seek, not a theatre but the theatre's anti-self, an art that can appease all within us that becomes uneasy as the curtain falls and the house breaks into applause.

VII

Meanwhile the Popular Theatre should grow always more objective; more and more a reflection of the general mind; more and more a discovery of the simple emotions that make all men kin, clearing itself the while of sentimentality, the wreckage of an obsolete popular culture, seeking always not to feel and to imagine but to understand and to see. Let those who are all personality, who can only feel and imagine, leave it, before their presence become a corruption and turn it from its honesty. The rhetoric of d'Annunzio, the melodrama and spectacle of the later Maeterlinck, are the insincerities of subjectives, who being very able men have learned to hold an audience that is not their natural audience. To be intelligible they are compelled to harden, to externalise and deform. The popular play left to itself may not lack vicissitude and development, for it may pass, though more slowly than the novel which need not carry with it so great a crowd, from the physical objectivity of Fielding and Defoe to the spiritual objectivity of Tolstoy and Dostoievsky, for beyond the whole we reach by unbiassed intellect there is another whole reached by resignation and the denial of self.

VIII

The two great energies of the world that in Shakespeare's day penetrated each other have fallen apart as speech and music fell apart at the Renaissance, and that has brought each to greater freedom, and we have to prepare a stage for the whole wealth of modern lyricism, for an art that is close to pure music, for those energies that would free the arts from imitation, that would ally acting to decoration and to the dance. We are not yet conscious, for as yet we have no philosophy while the opposite energy is conscious. All visible history, the discoveries of science, the discussions of politics, are with it; but as I read the world, the sudden changes, or rather the sudden revelation of future changes, are not from visible history but from its anti-self. Blake says somewhere in a Prophetic Book that things must complete themselves before they pass away, and every new logical development of the objective energy intensifies in an exact correspondence a counter energy, or rather adds to an always deepening unanalysable longing. That counter longing, having no visible past, can only become a conscious energy suddenly, in those moments of revelation which are as a flash of lightning. Are we approaching

a supreme moment of self-consciousness, the two halves of the soul separate and face to face? A certain friend of mine has written upon this subject a couple of intricate poems called 'The Faces of the Moon' and 'The Double Vision' respectively, which are my continual study, and I must refer the reader to these poems for the necessary mathematical calculations. Were it not for that other gyre turning inward in exact measure with the outward whirl of its fellow, we would fall in a generation or so under some tyranny that would cease at last to be a tyranny, so perfect our acquiescence.

Constrained, arraigned, baffled, bent and unbent
By these wire-jointed jaws and limbs of wood,
Themselves obedient,
Knowing not evil and good;

Obedient to some hidden magical breath.
They do not even feel, so abstract are they,
So dead beyond our death,
Triumph that we obey.

W. B. Yeats.

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

'The sorrowful are dumb for thee'

Lament of Morion Shehone
for Miss Mary Bourke.

TO
MAUD GONNE

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

SHEMUS RUA, *a Peasant.*
MARY, *his Wife.*
TEIG, *his Son.*
ALEEL, *a Poet.*
THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN.
OONA, *her Foster Mother.*
Two Demons disguised as Merchants.
Peasants, Servants, Angelical Beings.

The Scene is laid in Ireland and in old times.

SCENE I

SCENE.—*A room with lighted fire, and a door into the open air, through which one sees, perhaps, the trees of a wood, and these trees should be painted in flat colour upon a gold or diapered sky. The walls are of one colour. The scene should have the effect of missal painting.* MARY, *a woman of forty years or so, is grinding a quern.*

MARY. What can have made the grey hen flutter so?

[TEIG, *a boy of fourteen, is coming in with turf, which he lays beside the hearth.*

TEIG. They say that now the land is famine struck
The graves are walking.

MARY. There is something that the hen hears.

TEIG. And that is not the worst; at Tubber-vanach
A woman met a man with ears spread out,
And they moved up and down like a bat's wing.

MARY. What can have kept your father all this while?

TEIG. Two nights ago, at Carrick-orus churchyard,
A herdsman met a man who had no mouth,
Nor eyes, nor ears! his face a wall of flesh;
He saw him plainly by the light of the moon.

MARY. Look out, and tell me if your father's coming. [TEIG *goes to door.*

TEIG. Mother!

MARY. What is it?

TEIG. In the bush beyond,
There are two birds—if you can call them birds—
I could not see them rightly for the leaves.
But they've the shape and colour of horned owls
And I'm half certain they've a human face.

MARY. Mother of God, defend us!

TEIG. They're looking at me.
What is the good of praying? father says.
God and the Mother of God have dropped asleep.
What do they care, he says, though the whole land
Squeal like a rabbit under a weasel's tooth?

MARY. You'll bring misfortune with your blasphemies
Upon your father, or yourself, or me.
Would God that he were home—ah, there he is. [SHEMUS *comes in.*

What was it kept you in the wood? You know
I cannot get all sorts of accidents
Out of my mind till you are home again.
SHEMUS. I'm in no mood to listen to your clatter.
Although I tramped the woods for half a day,
I've taken nothing, for the very rats,
Badgers, and hedgehogs seem to have died of drought,
And there was scarce a wind in the parched leaves.
TEIG. Then you have brought no dinner.
SHEMUS. After that
I sat among the beggars at the cross-roads,
And held a hollow hand among the others.
MARY. What, did you beg?
SHEMUS. I had no chance to beg,
For when the beggars saw me they cried out
They would not have another share their alms,
And hunted me away with sticks and stones.
TEIG. You said that you would bring us food or money.
SHEMUS. What's in the house?
TEIG. A bit of mouldy bread.
MARY. There's flour enough to make another loaf.

TEIG. And when that's gone?
MARY. There is the hen in the coop.
SHEMUS. My curse upon the beggars, my curse upon them!
TEIG. And the last penny gone.
SHEMUS. When the hen's gone,
What can we do but live on sorrel and dock,
And dandelion, till our mouths are green?
MARY. God, that to this hour has found bit and sup,
Will cater for us still.
SHEMUS. His kitchen's bare.
There were five doors that I looked through this day
And saw the dead and not a soul to wake them.
MARY. Maybe He'd have us die because He knows,
When the ear is stopped and when the eye is stopped,
That every wicked sight is hid from the eye,
And all fool talk from the ear.
SHEMUS. Who's passing there?
And mocking us with music?
[*A stringed instrument without.*
TEIG. A young man plays it,
There's an old woman and a lady with him.
SHEMUS. What is the trouble of the poor to her?

Nothing at all or a harsh radishy sauce
For the day's meat.
MARY. God's pity on the rich.
Had we been through as many doors, and seen
The dishes standing on the polished wood
In the wax candle light, we'd be as hard,
And there's the needle's eye at the end of all.
SHEMUS. My curse upon the rich.
TEIG. They're coming here.
SHEMUS. Then down upon that stool, down quick, I say,
And call up a whey face and a whining voice,
And let your head be bowed upon your knees.
MARY. Had I but time to put the place to rights.

CATHLEEN, OONA, *and* ALEEL *enter.*

CATHLEEN. God save all here. There is a certain house,
An old grey castle with a kitchen garden,
A cider orchard and a plot for flowers,
Somewhere among these woods.
MARY. We know it, lady.
A place that's set among impassable walls
As though world's trouble could not find it out.
CATHLEEN. It may be that we are that trouble, for we—

Although we've wandered in the wood this hour—
Have lost it too, yet I should know my way,
For I lived all my childhood in that house.
MARY. Then you are Countess Cathleen?
CATHLEEN. And this woman,
Oona, my nurse, should have remembered it,
For we were happy for a long time there.
OONA. The paths are overgrown with thickets now,
Or else some change has come upon my sight.
CATHLEEN. And this young man, that should have known the woods—
Because we met him on their border but now,
Wandering and singing like a wave of the sea—
Is so wrapped up in dreams of terrors to come
That he can give no help.
MARY. You have still some way,
But I can put you on the trodden path
Your servants take when they are marketing.
But first sit down and rest yourself awhile,
For my old fathers served your fathers, lady,
Longer than books can tell—and it were strange
If you and yours should not be welcome here.
CATHLEEN. And it were stranger still were I ungrateful

For such kind welcome—but I must be gone,
For the night's gathering in.
SHEMUS. It is a long while
Since I've set eyes on bread or on what buys it.
CATHLEEN. So you are starving even in this wood.
Where I had thought I would find nothing changed.
But that's a dream, for the old worm o' the world
Can eat its way into what place it pleases.
[*She gives money.*
TEIG. Beautiful lady, give me something too;
I fell but now, being weak with hunger and thirst.
And lay upon the threshold like a log.
CATHLEEN. I gave for all and that was all I had.
Look, my purse is empty. I have passed
By starving men and women all this day,
And they have had the rest; but take the purse,
The silver clasps on't may be worth a trifle.
And if you'll come to-morrow to my house
You shall have twice the sum.
[ALEEL *begins to play.*
SHEMUS [*muttering*]. What, music, music!

CATHLEEN. Ah, do not blame the finger
on the string;
The doctors bid me fly the unlucky times
And find distraction for my thoughts, or else
Pine to my grave.
SHEMUS. I have said nothing, lady.
Why should the like of us complain?
OONA. Have done.
Sorrows that she's but read of in a book
Weigh on her mind as if they had been
her own.
[OONA, MARY, *and* CATHLEEN *go out.*
ALEEL *looks defiantly at* SHEMUS.
ALEEL [*singing*]. Were I but crazy for
love's sake
I know who'd measure out his length,
I know the heads that I should break,
For crazy men have double strength.
There! all's out now to leave or take,
And who mocks music mocks at love;
And when I'm crazy for love's sake
I'll not go far to choose.
[*Snapping his fingers in* SHEMUS'
face.]
Enough!
I know the heads that I should break.
[*He takes a step towards the door
and then turns again.*
Shut to the door before the night has fallen,
For who can say what walks, or in what
shape.

Some devilish creature flies in the air; but now
Two grey-horned owls hooted above our heads.

[*He goes out, his singing dies away.* MARY *comes in.* SHEMUS *has been counting the money.*

SHEMUS. So that fool's gone.

TEIG. He's seen the horned owls too.
There's no good luck in owls, but it may be
That the ill luck's to fall upon his head.

MARY. You never thanked her ladyship.

SHEMUS. Thank her,
For seven halfpence and a silver bit?

TEIG. But for this empty purse?

SHEMUS. What's that for thanks,
Or what's the double of it that she promised?
With bread and flesh and every sort of food
Up to a price no man has heard the like of
And rising every day.

MARY. We have all she had;
She emptied out the purse before our eyes.

SHEMUS [*to* MARY, *who has gone to close the door*]. Leave that door open.

MARY. When those that have read books,
And seen the seven wonders of the world,
Fear what's above or what's below the ground,
It's time that poverty should bolt the door.

SHEMUS. I'll have no bolts, for there is not a thing

That walks above the ground or under it
I had not rather welcome to this house
Than any more of mankind, rich or poor.
TEIG. So that they brought us money.
SHEMUS. I heard say
There's something that appears like a white bird,
A pigeon or a seagull or the like,
But if you hit it with a stone or a stick
It clangs as though it had been made of brass,
And that if you dig down where it was scratching
You'll find a crock of gold.
TEIG. But dream of gold
For three nights running, and there's always gold.
SHEMUS. You might be starved before you've dug it out.
TEIG. But maybe if you called, something would come,
They have been seen of late.
MARY. Is it call devils?
Call devils from the wood, call them in here?
SHEMUS. So you'd stand up against me, and you'd say
Who or what I am to welcome here.
[*He hits her.*
That is to show who's master.
TEIG. Call them in.
MARY. God help us all!

SHEMUS. Pray, if you have a mind to.
It's little that the sleepy ears above
Care for your words; but I'll call what I please.

TEIG. There is many a one, they say, had money from them.

SHEMUS [*at door*]. Whatever you are that walk the woods at night,
So be it that you have not shouldered up
Out of a grave—for I'll have nothing human—
And have free hands, a friendly trick of speech,
I welcome you. Come, sit beside the fire.
What matter if your head's below your arms
Or you've a horse's tail to whip your flank,
Feathers instead of hair, that's all but nothing,
Come, share what bread and meat is in the house,
And stretch your heels and warm them in the ashes.
And after that, let's share and share alike
And curse all men and women. Come in, come in.
What, is there no one there? [*Turning from door.*] And yet they say
They are as common as the grass, and ride
Even upon the book in the priest's hand.

[TEIG *lifts one arm slowly and points toward the door and begins moving*

backward. SHEMUS *turns, he also sees something and begins moving backward.* MARY *does the same. A man dressed as an Eastern merchant comes in carrying a small carpet. He unrolls it and sits cross-legged at one end of it. Another man dressed in the same way follows, and sits at the other end. This is done slowly and deliberately. When they are seated they take money out of embroidered purses at their girdles and begin arranging it on the carpet.*

TEIG. You speak to them.

SHEMUS. No, you.

TEIG. 'Twas you that called them.

SHEMUS [*coming nearer*]. I'd make so bold, if you would pardon it,
To ask if there's a thing you'd have of us.
Although we are but poor people, if there is,
Why, if there is——

FIRST MERCHANT. We've travelled a long road,
For we are merchants that must tramp the world,
And now we look for supper and a fire
And a safe corner to count money in.

SHEMUS. I thought you were . . . but that's no matter now—

There had been words between my wife
and me
Because I said I would be master here,
And ask in what I pleased or who I pleased
And so . . . but that is nothing to the point,
Because it's certain that you are but
merchants.

FIRST MERCHANT. We travel for the
Master of all merchants.

SHEMUS. Yet if you were that I had
thought but now
I'd welcome you no less. Be what you
please
And you'll have supper at the market rate,
That means that what was sold for but a
penny
Is now worth fifty.

FIRST MERCHANT [*arranging money*].
Our Master bids us pay
So good a price, that all who deal with us
Shall eat, drink, and be merry.

SHEMUS [*to* MARY]. Bestir yourself,
Go kill and draw the fowl, while Teig and I
Lay out the plates and make a better fire.

MARY. I will not cook for you.

SHEMUS. Not cook! not cook!
Do not be angry. She wants to pay me
back
Because I struck her in that argument.
But she'll get sense again. Since the dearth
came

We rattle one on another as though we were
Knives thrown into a basket to be cleaned.
MARY. I will not cook for you, because I know
In what unlucky shape you sat but now
Outside this door.
TEIG. It's this, your honours:
Because of some wild words my father said
She thinks you are not of those who cast a shadow.
SHEMUS. I said I'd make the devils of the wood
Welcome, if they'd a mind to eat and drink;
But it is certain that you are men like us.
FIRST MERCHANT. It's strange that she should think we cast no shadow,
For there is nothing on the ridge of the world
That's more substantial than the merchants are
That buy and sell you.
MARY. If you are not demons,
And seeing what great wealth is spread out there,
Give food or money to the starving poor.
FIRST MERCHANT. If we knew how to find deserving poor
We'd do our share.

MARY. But seek them patiently.
FIRST MERCHANT. We know the evils of mere charity.
MARY. Those scruples may befit a common time.
I had thought there was a pushing to and fro,
At times like this, that overset the scale
And trampled measure down.
FIRST MERCHANT. But if already
We'd thought of a more prudent way than that?
SECOND MERCHANT. If each one brings a bit of merchandise,
We'll give him such a price he never dreamt of.
MARY. Where shall the starving come at merchandise?
FIRST MERCHANT. We will ask nothing but what all men have.
MARY. Their swine and cattle, fields and implements
Are sold and gone.
FIRST MERCHANT. They have not sold all yet.
For there's a vaporous thing—that may be nothing,
But that's the buyer's risk—a second self,
They call immortal for a story's sake.
SHEMUS. They come to buy our souls?
TEIG. I'll barter mine.

Why should we starve for what may be
but nothing?

MARY. Teig and Shemus——

SHEMUS. What can be but nothing?

What has God poured out of His bag but
famine?

Satan gives money.

TEIG. Yet no thunder stirs.

FIRST MERCHANT. There is a heap for
each.

[SHEMUS *goes to take money.*

But no, not yet,

For there's a work I have to set you to.

SHEMUS. So then you're as deceitful as
the rest,

And all that talk of buying what's but a
vapour

Is fancy bread. I might have known as
much,

Because that's how the trick-o'-the-loop man
talks.

FIRST MERCHANT. That's for the work,
each has its separate price;

But neither price is paid till the work's done.

TEIG. The same for me.

MARY. Oh, God, why are you still?

FIRST MERCHANT. You've but to cry aloud
at every cross-road,

At every house door, that we buy men's
souls

And give so good a price that all may live

In mirth and comfort till the famine's done,
Because we are Christian men.

SHEMUS. Come, let's away.

TEIG. I shall keep running till I've earned the price.

SECOND MERCHANT [*who has risen and gone towards fire*]. Stop; you must have proof behind the words.
So here's your entertainment on the road.

[*He throws a bag of money on the ground.*

Live as you please; our Master's generous.

[TEIG *and* SHEMUS *have stopped.* TEIG *takes the money. They go out.*

MARY. Destroyers of souls, God will destroy you quickly.
You shall at last dry like dry leaves and hang
Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of God.

SECOND MERCHANT. Curse to your fill, for saints will have their dreams.

FIRST MERCHANT. Though we're but vermin that our Master sent
To overrun the world, he at the end
Shall pull apart the pale ribs of the moon
And quench the stars in the ancestral night.

MARY. God is all powerful.

SECOND MERCHANT. Pray, you shall need Him.
You shall eat dock and grass, and dandelion,

Till that low threshold there becomes a wall,
And when your hands can scarcely drag your body
We shall be near you. [MARY *faints.*

[*The* FIRST MERCHANT *takes up the carpet, spreads it before the fire and stands in front of it warming his hands.*

FIRST MERCHANT. Our faces go unscratched,
Wring the neck o' that fowl, scatter the flour
And look if there is bread upon the shelves.
We'll turn the fowl upon the spit and roast it,
And eat the supper we were bidden to,
Now that the house is quiet, praise our Master,
And stretch and warm our heels among the ashes.

END OF SCENE I

SCENE II

FRONT SCENE.—*A wood with perhaps distant view of turreted house at one side, but all in flat colour, without light and shade and against a diapered or gold background.*

COUNTESS CATHLEEN *comes in leaning upon* ALEEL'S *arm.* OONA *follows them.*

CATHLEEN [*stopping*]. Surely this leafy corner, where one smells
The wild bee's honey, has a story too?
OONA. There is the house at last.
ALEEL. A man, they say,
Loved Maeve the Queen of all the invisible host,
And died of his love nine centuries ago.
And now, when the moon's riding at the full,
She leaves her dancers lonely and lies there
Upon that level place, and for three days
Stretches and sighs and wets her long pale cheeks.
CATHLEEN. So she loves truly.

ALEEL. No, but wets her cheeks,
Lady, because she has forgot his name.
CATHLEEN. She'd sleep that trouble away
—though it must be
A heavy trouble to forget his name—
If she had better sense.
OONA. Your own house, lady.
ALEEL. She sleeps high up on wintry
Knock-na-rea
In an old cairn of stones; while her poor
women
Must lie and jog in the wave if they would
sleep—
Being water born—yet if she cry their names
They run up on the land and dance in the
moon
Till they are giddy and would love as men
do,
And be as patient and as pitiful.
But there is nothing that will stop in their
heads
They've such poor memories, though they
weep for it.
Oh, yes, they weep; that's when the moon
is full.
CATHLEEN. Is it because they have short
memories
They live so long?
ALEEL. What's memory but the ash
That chokes our fires that have begun to
sink?

And they've a dizzy, everlasting fire.
OONA. There is your own house, lady.
CATHLEEN. Why, that's true,
And we'd have passed it without noticing.
ALEEL. A curse upon it for a meddlesome house!
Had it but stayed away I would have known
What Queen Maeve thinks on when the moon is pinched;
And whether now—as in the old days—the dancers
Set their brief love on men.
OONA. Rest on my arm.
These are no thoughts for any Christian ear.
ALEEL. I am younger, she would be too heavy for you.

[*He begins taking his lute out of the bag;* CATHLEEN, *who has turned towards* OONA, *turns back to him.*

This hollow box remembers every foot
That danced upon the level grass of the world,
And will tell secrets if I whisper to it.

[*Sings*]

Lift up the white knee;
Hear what they sing,
Those young dancers
That in a ring

Raved but now
Of the hearts that broke
Long, long ago
For their sake.

OONA. New friends are sweet.

ALEEL

'But the dance changes,
Lift up the gown,
All that sorrow
Is trodden down.'

OONA. The empty rattle-pate! Lean on this arm,
That I can tell you is a christened arm,
And not like some, if we are to judge by speech.
But as you please. It is time I was forgot.
Maybe it is not on this arm you slumbered
When you were as helpless as a worm.

ALEEL. Stay with me till we come to your own house.

CATHLEEN [*sitting down*]. When I am rested I will need no help.

ALEEL. I thought to have kept her from remembering
The evil of the times for full ten minutes;
But now when seven are out you come between.

OONA. Talk on; what does it matter what you say,
For you have not been christened?

ALEEL. Old woman, old woman,
You robbed her of three minutes' peace of mind,
And though you live unto a hundred years,
And wash the feet of beggars and give alms,
And climb Croaghpatrick, you shall not be pardoned.

OONA. How does a man who never was baptized
Know what Heaven pardons?

ALEEL. You are a sinful woman.

OONA. I care no more than if a pig had grunted.

Enter CATHLEEN'S *Steward.*

STEWARD. I am not to blame, for I had locked the gate,
The forester's to blame. The men climbed in
At the east corner where the elm-tree is.

CATHLEEN. I do not understand you, who has climbed?

STEWARD. Then God be thanked, I am the first to tell you.
I was afraid some other of the servants—
Though I've been on the watch—had been the first,
And mixed up truth and lies, your ladyship.

CATHLEEN [*rising*]. Has some misfortune happened?

STEWARD. Yes, indeed.
The forester that let the branches lie
Against the wall's to blame for everything,
For that is how the rogues got into the garden.
CATHLEEN. I thought to have escaped misfortune here.
Has any one been killed?
STEWARD. Oh, no, not killed.
They have stolen half a cart-load of green cabbage.
CATHLEEN. But maybe they were starving.
STEWARD. That is certain.
To rob or starve, that was the choice they had.
CATHLEEN. A learned theologian has laid down
That starving men may take what's necessary,
And yet be sinless.
OONA. Sinless and a thief!
There should be broken bottle on the wall.
CATHLEEN. And if it be a sin, while faith's unbroken
God cannot help but pardon. There is no soul
But it's unlike all others in the world,
Nor one but lifts a strangeness to God's love
Till that's grown infinite, and therefore none
Whose loss were less than irremediable
Although it were the wickedest in the world.

Enter TEIG *and* SHEMUS.

STEWARD. What are you running for? Pull off your cap,
Do you not see who's there?
SHEMUS. I cannot wait.
I am running to the world with the best news
That has been brought it for a thousand years.
STEWARD. Then get your breath and speak.
SHEMUS. If you'd my news
You'd run as fast and be as out of breath.
TEIG. Such news, we shall be carried on men's shoulders.
SHEMUS. There's something every man has carried with him.
And thought no more about than if it were
A mouthful of the wind; and now it's grown
A marketable thing!
TEIG. And yet it seemed
As useless as the paring of one's nails.
SHEMUS. What sets me laughing when I think of it,
Is that a rogue who's lain in lousy straw,
If he but sell it, may set up his coach.
TEIG [*laughing*]. There are two gentlemen who buy men's souls.
CATHLEEN. O God!
TEIG. And maybe there's no soul at all.

STEWARD. They're drunk or mad.
TEIG. Look at the price they give.
[*Showing money.*
SHEMUS [*tossing up money*]. 'Go cry it all about the world,' they said.
'Money for souls, good money for a soul.'
CATHLEEN. Give twice and thrice and twenty times their money,
And get your souls again. I will pay all.
SHEMUS. Not we! not we! For souls—if there are souls—
But keep the flesh out of its merriment.
I shall be drunk and merry.
TEIG. Come, let's away.
[*He goes.*
CATHLEEN. But there's a world to come.
SHEMUS. And if there is,
I'd rather trust myself into the hands
That can pay money down than to the hands
That have but shaken famine from the bag.
[*He goes out* R.
[*Lilting*]
'There's money for a soul, sweet yellow money.
There's money for men's souls, good money, money.'
CATHLEEN [*to* ALEEL]. Go call them here again, bring them by force,
Beseech them, bribe, do anything you like;
[ALEEL *goes.*
And you too follow, add your prayers to his.

[OONA, *who has been praying, goes out.*
Steward, you know the secrets of my house.
How much have I?

STEWARD. A hundred kegs of gold.

CATHLEEN. How much have I in castles?

STEWARD. As much more.

CATHLEEN. How much have I in pasture?

STEWARD. As much more.

CATHLEEN. How much have I in forests?

STEWARD. As much more.

CATHLEEN. Keeping this house alone, sell all I have.
Go barter where you please, but come again
With herds of cattle and with ships of meal.

STEWARD. God's blessing light upon your ladyship.
You will have saved the land.

CATHLEEN. Make no delay.

[*He goes* L.

ALEEL *and* OONA *return.*

CATHLEEN. They have not come; speak quickly.

ALEEL. One drew his knife.
And said that he would kill the man or woman
That stopped his way; and when I would have stopped him
He made this stroke at me; but it is nothing.

CATHLEEN. You shall be tended. From this day for ever

I'll have no joy or sorrow of my own.

OONA. Their eyes shone like the eyes of birds of prey.

CATHLEEN. Come, follow me, for the earth burns my feet
Till I have changed my house to such a refuge
That the old and ailing, and all weak of heart,
May escape from beak and claw; all, all, shall come
Till the walls burst and the roof fall on us.
From this day out I have nothing of my own.

[*She goes.*

OONA [*taking* ALEEL *by the arm and as she speaks bandaging his wound*]. She has found something now to put her hand to,
And you and I are of no more account
Than flies upon a window-pane in the winter.

[*They go out.*

END OF SCENE II

SCENE III

SCENE.—*Hall in the house of* COUNTESS CATHLEEN. *At the Left an oratory with steps leading up to it. At the Right a tapestried wall, more or less repeating the form of the oratory, and a great chair with its back against the wall. In the Centre are two or more arches through which one can see dimly the trees of the garden.* CATHLEEN *is kneeling in front of the altar in the oratory; there is a hanging lighted lamp over the altar.* ALEEL *enters.*

ALEEL. I have come to bid you leave this castle and fly
Out of these woods.
CATHLEEN. What evil is there here
That is not everywhere from this to the sea?
ALEEL. They who have sent me walk invisible.
CATHLEEN. So it is true what I have heard men say,
That you have seen and heard what others cannot.

ALEEL. I was asleep in my bed, and while I slept
My dreams became a fire; and in the fire
One walked and he had birds about his head.
CATHLEEN. I have heard that one of the old gods walked so.
ALEEL. It may be that he is angelical;
And, lady, he bids me call you from these woods.
And you must bring but your old foster-mother,
And some few serving men, and live in the hills,
Among the sounds of music and the light
Of waters, till the evil days are done.
For here some terrible death is waiting you,
Some unimagined evil, some great darkness
That fable has not dreamt of, nor sun nor moon
Scattered.
CATHLEEN. No, not angelical.
ALEEL. This house
You are to leave with some old trusty man,
And bid him shelter all that starve or wander
While there is food and house room.
CATHLEEN. He bids me go
Where none of mortal creatures but the swan
Dabbles, and there you would pluck the harp, when the trees
Had made a heavy shadow about our door,
And talk among the rustling of the reeds,

When night hunted the foolish sun away
With stillness and pale tapers. No—no—
no!
I cannot. Although I weep, I do not weep
Because that life would be most happy and
here
I find no way, no end. Nor do I weep
Because I had longed to look upon your face,
But that a night of prayer has made me
weary.

ALEEL [*prostrating himself before her*].
Let Him that made mankind, the angels
and devils
And dearth and plenty, mend what He has
made,
For when we labour in vain and eye still sees
Heart breaks in vain.

CATHLEEN. How would that quiet end?

ALEEL. How but in healing?

CATHLEEN. You have seen my tears
And I can see your hand shake on the
floor.

ALEEL [*faltering*]. I thought but of healing.
He was angelical.

CATHLEEN [*turning away from him*]. No,
not angelical, but of the old gods,
Who wander about the world to awaken the
heart——
The passionate, proud heart—that all the
angels,

Leaving nine heavens empty, would rock to sleep.

[*She goes to chapel door;* ALEEL *holds his clasped hands towards her for a moment hesitatingly, and then lets them fall beside him.*

CATHLEEN. Do not hold out to me beseeching hands.
This heart shall never waken on earth. I have sworn,
By her whose heart the seven sorrows have pierced,
To pray before this altar until my heart
Has grown to Heaven like a tree, and there
Rustled its leaves, till Heaven has saved my people.

ALEEL [*who has risen*]. When one so great has spoken of love to one
So little as I, though to deny him love,
What can he but hold out beseeching hands,
Then let them fall beside him, knowing how greatly
They have overdared?

[*He goes towards the door of the hall. The* COUNTESS CATHLEEN *takes a few steps towards him.*

CATHLEEN. If the old tales are true,
Queens have wed shepherds and kings beggar-maids;
God's procreant waters flowing about your mind

Have made you more than kings or queens; and not you
But I am the empty pitcher.
ALEEL. Being silent,
I have said all, yet let me stay beside you.
CATHLEEN. No, no, not while my heart is shaken. No.
But you shall hear wind cry and water cry,
And curlew cry, and have the peace I longed for.
ALEEL. Give me your hand to kiss.
CATHLEEN. I kiss your forehead.
And yet I send you from me. Do not speak;
There have been women that bid men to rob
Crowns from the Country-under-Wave or apples
Upon a dragon-guarded hill, and all
That they might sift men's hearts and wills,
And trembled as they bid it, as I tremble
That lay a hard task on you, that you go,
And silently, and do not turn your head;
Good-bye; but do not turn your head and look;
Above all else, I would not have you look.
[ALEEL *goes.*
I never spoke to him of his wounded hand,
And now he is gone. [*She looks out.*]
I cannot see him, for all is dark outside.
Would my imagination and my heart
Were as little shaken as this holy flame!

[*She goes slowly into the chapel. The distant sound of an alarm bell. The two* MERCHANTS *enter hurriedly.*

SECOND MERCHANT. They are ringing the alarm, and in a moment
They'll be upon us.

FIRST MERCHANT [*going to a door at the side*]. Here is the Treasury,
You'd my commands to put them all to sleep.

SECOND MERCHANT. Some angel or else her prayers protected them.

[*Goes into the Treasury and returns with bags of treasure.* FIRST MERCHANT *has been listening at the oratory door.*

FIRST MERCHANT. She has fallen asleep.

[SECOND MERCHANT *goes out through one of the arches at the back and stands listening. The bags are at his feet.*

SECOND MERCHANT. We've all the treasure now,
So let's away before they've tracked us out.

FIRST MERCHANT. I have a plan to win her.

SECOND MERCHANT. You have time enough
If you would kill her and bear off her soul
Before they are upon us with their prayers;
They search the Western Tower.

FIRST MERCHANT. That may not be.
We cannot face the heavenly host in arms.
Her soul must come to us of its own will;
But being of the ninth and mightiest Hell
Where all are kings, I have a plan to win it.
Lady, we've news that's crying out for speech.

[CATHLEEN *wakes and comes to door of chapel.*

CATHLEEN. Who calls?

FIRST MERCHANT. Lady, we have brought news.

CATHLEEN. What are you?

FIRST MERCHANT. We are merchants, and we know the book of the world
Because we have walked upon its leaves; and there
Have read of late matters that much concern you;
And noticing the castle door stand open,
Came in to find an ear.

CATHLEEN. The door stands open,
That no one who is famished or afraid,
Despair of help or of a welcome with it.
But you have news, you say.

FIRST MERCHANT. We saw a man,
Heavy with sickness in the bog of Allen,
Whom you had bid buy cattle. Near Fair Head
We saw your grain ships lying all becalmed

In the dark night; and not less still than they,
Burned all their mirrored lanthorns in the sea.

CATHLEEN. Thanks be to God there's money in the house
That can buy grain from those who have stored it up
To prosper on the hunger of the poor.
But you've been far and know the signs of things,
When will this famine end?

FIRST MERCHANT. Day copies day,
And there's no sign of change, nor can it change,
With the wheat withered and the cattle dead.

CATHLEEN. And heard you of the demons who buy souls?

FIRST MERCHANT. There are some men who hold they have wolves' heads,
And say their limbs—dried by the infinite flame—
Have all the speed of storms; others, again,
Say they are gross and little; while a few
Will have it they seem much as mortals are,
But tall and brown and travelled—like us, lady—
Yet all agree a power is in their looks
That makes men bow, and flings a casting-net

About their souls, and that all men would go
And barter those poor vapours, were it not
You bribe them with the safety of your gold.

CATHLEEN. Praise God that I am wealthy.
Why do they sell?

FIRST MERCHANT. As we came in at the great door we saw
Your porter sleeping in his niche—a soul
Too little to be worth a hundred pence,
And yet they buy it for a hundred crowns.
But for a soul like yours, I heard them say,
They would give five hundred thousand crowns and more.

CATHLEEN. How can a heap of crowns pay for a soul?
Is the green grave so terrible a thing?

FIRST MERCHANT. Some sell because the money gleams, and some
Because they are in terror of the grave,
And some because their neighbours sold before,
And some because there is a kind of joy
In casting hope away, in losing joy,
In ceasing all resistance, in at last
Opening one's arms to the eternal flames,
In casting all sails out upon the wind;
To this—full of the gaiety of the lost—
Would all folk hurry if your gold were gone.

CATHLEEN. There is a something, Merchant, in your voice
That makes me fear. When you were telling how
A man may lose his soul and lose his God
Your eyes were lighted up, and when you told
How my poor money serves the people, both—
Merchants, forgive me—seemed to smile.
FIRST MERCHANT. I laugh
To think that all these people should be swung
As on a lady's shoe-string,—under them
The glowing leagues of never-ending flame.
CATHLEEN. There is a something in you that I fear;
A something not of us; were you not born
In some most distant corner of the world?

[*The* SECOND MERCHANT, *who has been listening at the door, comes forward, and as he comes a sound of voices and feet is heard.*

SECOND MERCHANT. Away now—they are in the passage—hurry,
For they will know us, and freeze up our hearts
With Ave Marys, and burn all our skin
With holy water.
FIRST MERCHANT. Farewell; for we must ride

Many a mile before the morning come;
Our horses beat the ground impatiently.

[*They go out. A number of* PEASANTS *enter by other door.*

FIRST PEASANT. Forgive us, lady, but we heard a noise.

SECOND PEASANT. We sat by the fireside telling vanities.

FIRST PEASANT. We heard a noise, but though we have searched the house
We have found nobody.

CATHLEEN. You are too timid,
For now you are safe from all the evil times,
There is no evil that can find you here.

OONA [*entering hurriedly*]. Ochone! Ochone! The treasure room is broken in.
The door stands open, and the gold is gone.

[PEASANTS *raise a lamentable cry.*

CATHLEEN. Be silent. [*The cry ceases.*] Have you seen nobody?

OONA. Ochone!
That my good mistress should lose all this money.

CATHLEEN. Let those among you—not too old to ride—
Get horses and search all the country round,
I'll give a farm to him who finds the thieves.

[*A man with keys at his girdle has come in while she speaks. There is*

a general murmur of 'The porter! the porter!'

PORTER. Demons were here. I sat beside the door
In my stone niche, and two owls passed me by,
Whispering with human voices.

OLD PEASANT. God forsakes us.

CATHLEEN. Old man, old man, He never closed a door
Unless one opened. I am desolate,
Because of a strange thought that's in my heart;
But I have still my faith; therefore be silent;
For surely He does not forsake the world,
But stands before it modelling in the clay
And moulding there His image. Age by age
The clay wars with His fingers and pleads hard
For its old, heavy, dull and shapeless ease;
But sometimes—though His hand is on it still—
It moves awry and demon hordes are born.

[PEASANTS *cross themselves.*

Yet leave me now, for I am desolate,
I hear a whisper from beyond the thunder.

[*She comes from the oratory door.*

Yet stay an instant. When we meet again
I may have grown forgetful. Oona, take
These two—the larder and the dairy keys.

[*To the* PORTER.]

But take you this. It opens the small room
Of herbs for medicine, every kind of herb.
The book of curses is on the upper shelf.

PORTER. Why do you do this, lady; did you see
Your coffin in a dream?

CATHLEEN. Ah, no, not that.
But I have come to a strange thought. I have heard
A sound of wailing in unnumbered hovels,
And I must go down, down—I know not where—
Pray for all men and women mad from famine;
Pray, you good neighbours.

[*The* PEASANTS *all kneel.* COUNTESS CATHLEEN *ascends the steps to the door of the oratory, and turning round stands there motionless for a little, and then cries in a loud voice:*

Mary, Queen of angels,
And all you clouds on clouds of saints, farewell!

END OF SCENE III

SCENE IV

FRONT SCENE.—*A wood near the Castle, as in Scene II. A group of* PEASANTS *pass.*

FIRST PEASANT. I have seen silver and copper, but not gold.

SECOND PEASANT. It's yellow and it shines.

FIRST PEASANT. It's beautiful.
The most beautiful thing under the sun,
That's what I've heard.

THIRD PEASANT. I have seen gold enough.

FOURTH PEASANT. I would not say that it's so beautiful.

FIRST PEASANT. But doesn't a gold piece glitter like the sun?
That's what my father, who'd seen better days,
Told me when I was but a little boy—
So high—so high, it's shining like the sun,
Round and shining, that is what he said.

SECOND PEASANT. There's nothing in the world it cannot buy.

FIRST PEASANT. They've bags and bags of it.

[*They go out. The two* MERCHANTS *follow silently. Then* ALEEL *passes over the stage singing.*

ALEEL

Impetuous heart, be still, be still,
Your sorrowful love can never be told,
Cover it up with a lonely tune.
He who could bend all things to His will
Has covered the door of the infinite fold
With the pale stars and the wandering moon.

END OF SCENE IV

SCENE V

SCENE.—*The house of* SHEMUS RUA. *There is an alcove at the back with curtains; in it a bed, and on the bed is the body of* MARY *with candles round it. The two* MERCHANTS *while they speak put a large book upon a table, arrange money, and so on.*

FIRST MERCHANT. Thanks to that lie I told about her ships
And that about the herdsman lying sick,
We shall be too much thronged with souls to-morrow.

SECOND MERCHANT. What has she in her coffers now but mice?

FIRST MERCHANT. When the night fell and I had shaped myself
Into the image of the man-headed owl,
I hurried to the cliffs of Donegal,
And saw with all their canvas full of wind
And rushing through the parti-coloured sea
Those ships that bring the woman grain and meal.
They're but three days from us.

SECOND MERCHANT. When the dew rose
I hurried in like feathers to the east,
And saw nine hundred oxen driven through Meath
With goads of iron. They're but three days from us.
FIRST MERCHANT. Three days for traffic.
[PEASANTS *crowd in with* TEIG *and* SHEMUS.
SHEMUS. Come in, come in, you are welcome.
That is my wife. She mocked at my great masters,
And would not deal with them. Now there she is;
She does not even know she was a fool,
So great a fool she was.
TEIG. She would not eat
One crumb of bread bought with our master's money,
But lived on nettles, dock, and dandelion.
SHEMUS. There's nobody could put into her head
That Death is the worst thing can happen us.
Though that sounds simple, for her tongue grew rank
With all the lies that she had heard in chapel.
Draw to the curtain. [TEIG *draws it.*]
You'll not play the fool
While these good gentlemen are there to save you.

SECOND MERCHANT. Since the drought
came they drift about in a throng,
Like autumn leaves blown by the dreary
winds.
Come, deal—come, deal.
FIRST MERCHANT. Who will come deal
with us?
SHEMUS. They are out of spirit, sir, with
lack of food,
Save four or five. Here, sir, is one of these;
The others will gain courage in good time.
MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I come to deal—if
you give honest price.
FIRST MERCHANT [*reading in a book*].
'John Maher, a man of substance, with
dull mind,
And quiet senses and unventurous heart.
The angels think him safe.' Two hundred
crowns,
All for a soul, a little breath of wind.
THE MAN. I ask three hundred crowns.
You have read there
That no mere lapse of days can make me
yours.
FIRST MERCHANT. There is something
more writ here—'Often at night
He is wakeful from a dread of growing poor,
And thereon wonders if there's any man
That he could rob in safety.'
A PEASANT. Who'd have thought it?
And I was once alone with him at midnight.

ANOTHER PEASANT. I will not trust my mother after this.

FIRST MERCHANT. There is this crack in you—two hundred crowns.

A PEASANT. That's plenty for a rogue.

ANOTHER PEASANT. I'd give him nothing.

SHEMUS. You'll get no more—so take what's offered you.

[*A general murmur, during which the* MIDDLE-AGED MAN *takes money, and slips into background, where he sinks on to a seat.*

FIRST MERCHANT. Has no one got a better soul than that?
If only for the credit of your parishes,
Traffic with us.

A WOMAN. What will you give for mine?

FIRST MERCHANT [*reading in book*]. 'Soft, handsome, and still young'—not much, I think.
'It's certain that the man she's married to
Knows nothing of what's hidden in the jar
Between the hour-glass and the pepper-pot.'

THE WOMAN. The scandalous book.

FIRST MERCHANT. 'Nor how when he's away
At the horse fair the hand that wrote what's hid
Will tap three times upon the window-pane.'

THE WOMAN. And if there is a letter, that is no reason
Why I should have less money than the others.

FIRST MERCHANT. You're almost safe, I give you fifty crowns.

[*She turns to go.*

A hundred, then.

SHEMUS. Woman, have sense—come, come.
Is this a time to haggle at the price?
There, take it up. There, there. That's right.

[*She takes them and goes into the crowd.*

FIRST MERCHANT. Come, deal, deal, deal. It is but for charity.
We buy such souls at all; a thousand sins
Made them our Master's long before we came.

ALEEL *enters.*

ALEEL. Here, take my soul, for I am tired of it.
I do not ask a price.

SHEMUS. Not ask a price?
How can you sell your soul without a price?
I would not listen to his broken wits;
His love for Countess Cathleen has so crazed him

He hardly understands what he is saying.

ALEEL. The trouble that has come on Countess Cathleen,
The sorrow that is in her wasted face,
The burden in her eyes, have broke my wits,
And yet I know I'd have you take my soul.

FIRST MERCHANT. We cannot take your soul, for it is hers.

ALEEL. No, but you must. Seeing it cannot help her
I have grown tired of it.

FIRST MERCHANT. Begone from me,
I may not touch it.

ALEEL. Is your power so small?
And must I bear it with me all my days?
May you be scorned and mocked!

FIRST MERCHANT. Drag him away.
He troubles me.

[TEIG *and* SHEMUS *lead* ALEEL *into the crowd.*

SECOND MERCHANT. His gaze has filled me, brother,
With shaking and a dreadful fear.

FIRST MERCHANT. Lean forward
And kiss the circlet where my Master's lips
Were pressed upon it when he sent us hither;
You shall have peace once more.

[SECOND MERCHANT *kisses the gold circlet that is about the head of the* FIRST MERCHANT.

I, too, grow weary,

But there is something moving in my heart
Whereby I know that what we seek the most
Is drawing near—our labour will soon end.
Come, deal, deal, deal, deal, deal; are you all dumb?
What, will you keep me from our ancient home,
And from the eternal revelry?

SECOND MERCHANT. Deal, deal.

SHEMUS. They say you beat the woman down too low.

FIRST MERCHANT. I offer this great price: a thousand crowns
For an old woman who was always ugly.

[*An old* PEASANT WOMAN *comes forward, and he takes up a book and reads:*

There is but little set down here against her.
'She has stolen eggs and fowl when times were bad,
But when the times grew better has confessed it;
She never missed her chapel of a Sunday
And when she could, paid dues.' Take up your money.

OLD WOMAN. God bless you, sir. [*She screams.*] Oh, sir, a pain went through me!

FIRST MERCHANT. That name is like a fire to all damned souls.

[*Murmur among the* PEASANTS, *who shrink back from her as she goes out.*

A PEASANT. How she screamed out!

SECOND PEASANT. And maybe we shall scream so.

THIRD PEASANT. I tell you there is no such place as hell.

FIRST MERCHANT. Can such a trifle turn you from your profit?
Come, deal; come, deal.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Master, I am afraid.

FIRST MERCHANT. I bought your soul, and there's no sense in fear
Now the soul's gone.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Give me my soul again.

WOMAN [*going on her knees and clinging to* MERCHANT]. And take this money too, and give me mine.

SECOND MERCHANT. Bear bastards, drink or follow some wild fancy;
For sighs and cries are the soul's work,
And you have none.

[*Throws the woman off.*

PEASANT. Come, let's away.

ANOTHER PEASANT. Yes, yes.

ANOTHER PEASANT. Come quickly; if that woman had not screamed
I would have lost my soul.

ANOTHER PEASANT. Come, come away.

[*They turn to door, but are stopped by shouts of 'Countess Cathleen! Countess Cathleen!'*

CATHLEEN [*entering*]. And so you trade once more?

FIRST MERCHANT. In spite of you.
What brings you here, saint with the sapphire eyes?

CATHLEEN. I come to barter a soul for a great price.

SECOND MERCHANT. What matter, if the soul be worth the price?

CATHLEEN. The people starve, therefore the people go
Thronging to you. I hear a cry come from them
And it is in my ears by night and day,
And I would have five hundred thousand crowns
That I may feed them till the dearth go by.

FIRST MERCHANT. It may be the soul's worth it.

CATHLEEN. There is more:
The souls that you have bought must be set free.

FIRST MERCHANT. We know of but one soul that's worth the price.

CATHLEEN. Being my own it seems a priceless thing.

SECOND MERCHANT. You offer us——
CATHLEEN. I offer my own soul.
A PEASANT. Do not, do not, for souls the like of ours
Are not precious to God as your soul is.
O! what would Heaven do without you, lady?
ANOTHER PEASANT. Look how their claws clutch in their leathern gloves.
FIRST MERCHANT. Five hundred thousand crowns; we give the price.
The gold is here; the souls even while you speak
Have slipped out of our bond, because your face
Has shed a light on them and filled their hearts.
But you must sign, for we omit no form
In buying a soul like yours.
SECOND MERCHANT. Sign with this quill.
It was a feather growing on the cock
That crowed when Peter dared deny his Master,
And all who use it have great honour in Hell.

[CATHLEEN *leans forward to sign.*

ALEEL [*rushing forward and snatching the pen from her*]. Leave all things to the builder of the heavens.
CATHLEEN. I have no thoughts; I hear a cry—a cry.

ALEEL [*casting the pen on the ground*]. I have seen a vision under a green hedge,
A hedge of hips and haws—men yet shall hear
The Archangels rolling Satan's empty skull
Over the mountain-tops.

FIRST MERCHANT. Take him away.

[TEIG *and* SHEMUS *drag him roughly away so that he falls upon the floor among the* PEASANTS. CATHLEEN *picks up parchment and signs, then turns towards the* PEASANTS.

CATHLEEN. Take up the money, and now come with me;
When we are far from this polluted place
I will give everybody money enough.

[*She goes out, the* PEASANTS *crowding around her and kissing her dress.* ALEEL *and the two* MERCHANTS *are left alone.*

SECOND MERCHANT. We must away and wait until she dies,
Sitting above her tower as two grey owls,
Waiting as many years as may be, guarding
Our precious jewel; waiting to seize her soul.

FIRST MERCHANT. We need but hover over her head in the air,
For she has only minutes. When she signed

Her heart began to break. Hush, hush, I hear
The brazen door of Hell move on its hinges, and the eternal revelry float hither
To hearten us.

SECOND MERCHANT. Leap feathered on the air
And meet them with her soul caught in your claws.

[*They rush out.* ALEEL *crawls into the middle of the room. The twilight has fallen and gradually darkens as the scene goes on. There is a distant muttering of thunder and a sound of rising storm.*

ALEEL. The brazen door stands wide, and Balor comes
Borne in his heavy car, and demons have lifted
The age-weary eyelids from the eyes that of old
Turned gods to stone; Barach, the traitor, comes
And the lascivious race, Cailitin,
That cast a druid weakness and decay
Over Sualtem's and old Dectera's child;
And that great king Hell first took hold upon
When he killed Naisi and broke Deirdre's heart

And all their heads are twisted to one side,
For when they lived they warred on beauty and peace
With obstinate, crafty, sidelong bitterness.
[OONA *enters.*
Crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm.
OONA. Where is the Countess Cathleen? All this day
Her eyes were full of tears, and when for a moment
Her hand was laid upon my hand it trembled,
And now I do not know where she is gone.
ALEEL. Cathleen has chosen other friends than us,
And they are rising through the hollow world.
Demons are out, old heron.
OONA. God guard her soul.
ALEEL. She's bartered it away this very hour,
As though we two were never in the world.
[*He points downward.*
First, Orchill, her pale, beautiful head alive,
Her body shadowy as vapour drifting
Under the dawn, for she who awoke desire
Has but a heart of blood when others die;
About her is a vapoury multitude
Of women alluring devils with soft laughter;
Behind her a host heat of the blood made sin,

But all the little pink white nails have grown
To be great talons.

[*He seizes* OONA *and drags her into the middle of the room and points downward with vehement gestures. The wind roars.*

They begin a song
And there is still some music on their tongues.

OONA [*casting herself face downward on the floor*]. O, Maker of all, protect her from the demons,
And if a soul must need be lost, take mine.

[ALEEL *kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear her words. The* PEASANTS *return. They carry the* COUNTESS CATHLEEN *and lay her upon the ground before* OONA *and* ALEEL. *She lies there as if dead.*

OONA. O, that so many pitchers of rough clay
Should prosper and the porcelain break in two!

[*She kisses the hands of* CATHLEEN.

A PEASANT. We were under the tree where the path turns,
When she grew pale as death and fainted away.
And while we bore her hither cloudy gusts
Blackened the world and shook us on our feet;

Draw the great bolt, for no man has beheld
So black, bitter, blinding, and sudden a storm.

[*One who is near the door draws the bolt.*

CATHLEEN. O, hold me, and hold me tightly, for the storm
Is dragging me away.

[OONA *takes her in her arms.* A WOMAN *begins to wail.*

PEASANTS. Hush!

PEASANTS. Hush!

PEASANT WOMEN. Hush!

OTHER PEASANT WOMEN. Hush!

CATHLEEN [*half rising*]. Lay all the bags of money in a heap,
And when I am gone, old Oona, share them out
To every man and woman: judge, and give
According to their needs.

A PEASANT WOMAN. And will she give
Enough to keep my children through the dearth?

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN. O, Queen of Heaven, and all you blessed saints,
Let us and ours be lost so she be shriven.

CATHLEEN. Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel;
I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes
Upon the nest under the eave, before
She wander the loud waters. Do not weep

Too great a while, for there is many a candle
On the High Altar though one fall. Aleel,
Who sang about the dancers of the woods,
That know not the hard burden of the world,
Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell!
And farewell, Oona, you who played with me,
And bore me in your arms about the house
When I was but a child and therefore happy,
Therefore happy, even like those that dance.
The storm is in my hair and I must go.

[*She dies.*

OONA. Bring me the looking-glass.

[*A* WOMAN *brings it to her out of the inner room.* OONA *holds it over the lips of* CATHLEEN. *All is silent for a moment. And then she speaks in a half scream:*

O, she is dead!

A PEASANT. She was the great white lily of the world.

A PEASANT. She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN. The little plant I love is broken in two.

[ALEEL *takes looking-glass from* OONA *and flings it upon the floor so that it is broken in many pieces.*

ALEEL. I shatter you in fragments, for the face
That brimmed you up with beauty is no more:
And die, dull heart, for she whose mournful words
Made you a living spirit has passed away
And left you but a ball of passionate dust.
And you, proud earth and plumy sea, fade out!
For you may hear no more her faltering feet,
But are left lonely amid the clamorous war
Of angels upon devils.

[*He stands up; almost every one is kneeling, but it has grown so dark that only confused forms can be seen.*

And I who weep
Call curses on you, Time and Fate and Change,
And have no excellent hope but the great hour
When you shall plunge headlong through bottomless space.

[*A flash of lightning followed immediately by thunder.*

A PEASANT WOMAN. Pull him upon his knees before his curses
Have plucked thunder and lightning on our heads.

ALEEL. Angels and devils clash in the middle air,
And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms.

[*A flash of lightning followed immediately by thunder.*

Yonder a bright spear, cast out of a sling,
Has torn through Balor's eye, and the dark clans
Fly screaming as they fled Moytura of old.

[*Everything is lost in darkness.*

AN OLD MAN. The Almighty wrath at our great weakness and sin
Has blotted out the world and we must die.

[*The darkness is broken by a visionary light. The* PEASANTS *seem to be kneeling upon the rocky slope of a mountain, and vapour full of storm and ever-changing light is sweeping above them and behind them. Half in the light, half in the shadow, stand armed angels. Their armour is old and worn, and their drawn swords dim and dinted. They stand as if upon the air in formation of battle and look downward with stern faces. The* PEASANTS *cast themselves on the ground.*

ALEEL. Look no more on the half-closed gates of Hell,

But speak to me, whose mind is smitten of God,
That it may be no more with mortal things,
And tell of her who lies there.

[*He seizes one of the angels.*

Till you speak
You shall not drift into eternity.

THE ANGEL. The light beats down; the gates of pearl are wide
And she is passing to the floor of peace,
And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair
Has fallen on her face; The Light of Lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

[ALEEL *releases the* ANGEL *and kneels.*

OONA. Tell them who walk upon the floor of peace
That I would die and go to her I love;
The years like great black oxen tread the world,
And God the herdsman goads them on behind
And I am broken by their passing feet.

[*A sound of far-off horns seems to come from the heart of the Light. The vision melts away, and the forms of the kneeling* PEASANTS *appear faintly in the darkness.*

NOTE

'The Countess Cathleen'

I found the story of the Countess Cathleen in what professed to be a collection of Irish folk-lore in an Irish newspaper some years ago. I wrote to the compiler, asking about its source, but got no answer, but have since heard that it was translated from *Les Matinées de Timothée Trimm* a good many years ago, and has been drifting about the Irish press ever since. Léo Lespès gives it as an Irish story, and though the editor of *Folklore* has kindly advertised for information, the only Christian variant I know of is a Donegal tale, given by Mr. Larminie in his *West Irish Folk Tales and Romances,* of a woman who goes to hell for ten years to save her husband, and stays there another ten, having been granted permission to carry away as many souls as could cling to her skirt. Léo Lespès may have added a few details, but I have no doubt of the essential antiquity of what seems to me the most impressive form of one of the supreme parables of the world. The parable came to the Greeks in the sacrifice of Alcestis, but her sacrifice was less overwhelming, less apparently irremediable. Léo Lespès tells the story as follows:—

Ce que je vais vous dire est un récit du carême irlandais. Le boiteux, l'aveugle, le paralytique des rues de Dublin ou de Limerick, vous le diraient mieux que moi, cher lecteur, si vous alliez le leur demander, un sixpence d'argent à la main.—Il n'est pas une jeune

fille catholique à laquelle on ne l'ait appris pendant les jours de préparation à la communion sainte, pas un berger des bords de la Blackwater qui ne le puisse redire à la veillée.

Il y a bien longtemps qu'il apparut tout-à-coup dans la vieille Irlande deux marchands inconnus dont personne n'avait ouï parler, et qui parlaient néanmoins avec la plus grande perfection la langue du pays. Leurs cheveux étaient noirs et ferrés avec de l'or et leurs robes d'une grande magnificence.

Tous deux semblaient avoir le même âge; ils paraissaient être des hommes de cinquante ans, car leur barbe grisonnait un peu.

Or, à cette époque, comme aujourd'hui, l'Irlande était pauvre, car le soleil avait éte rare, et des récoltes presque nulles. Les indigents ne savaient à quel saint se vouer, et la misère devenait de plus en plus terrible.

Dans l'hôtellerie où descendirent les marchands fastueux on chercha à pénétrer leurs desseins: mais ce fut en vain, ils demeurèrent silencieux et discrets.

Et pendant qu'ils demeurêrent dans l'hôtellerie, ils ne cessèrent de compter et de recompter des sacs de pièces d'or, dont la vive clarté s'apercevait à travers les vitres du logis.

Gentlemen, leur dit l'hôtesse un jour, d'où vient que vous êtes si opulents, et que, venus pour secourir la misère publique, vous ne fassiez pas de bonnes œuvres?

—Belle hôtesse, répondit l'un d'eux, nous n'avons pas voulu aller au-devant d'infortunes honorables, dans la crainte d'être trompés par des misères fictives: que la douleur frappe à la porte, nous ouvrirons.

Le lendemain, quand on sut qu'il existait deux opulents étrangers prêts à prodiguer l'or, la foule assiégea leur logis; mais les figures des gens qui en sortaient étaient bien diverses. Les uns avaient la fierté dans le regard, les autres portaient la honte au

front. Les deux trafiquants achetaient des âmes pour le démon. L'âme d'un vieillard valait vingt pièces d'or, pas un penny de plus; car Satan avait eu le temps d'y former hypothèque. L'âme d'une épouse en valait cinquante quand elle était jolie, ou cent quand elle était laide. L'âme d'une jeune fille se payait des prix fous: les fleurs les plus belles et les plus pures sont les plus chères.

Pendant ce temps, il existait dans la ville un ange de beauté, la comtesse Ketty O'Connor. Elle était l'idole du peuple, et la providence des indigents. Dès qu'elle eut appris que des mécréants profitaient de la misère publique pour dérober des cœurs à Dieu, elle fit appeler son majordome.

—Master Patrick, lui dit-elle, combien ai-je de pièces d'or dans mon coffre?

—Cent mille.

—Combien de bijoux?

—Pour autant d'argent.

—Combien de châteaux, de bois et de terres?

—Pour le double de ces sommes.

—Eh bien! Patrick, vendez tout ce qui n'est pas or et apportez-m'en le montant. Je ne veux garder à moi que ce castel et le champ qui l'entoure.

Deux jours après, les ordres de la pieuse Ketty étaient exécutés et le trésor était distribué aux pauvres au fur et à mesure de leurs besoins.

Ceci ne faisait pas le compte, dit la tradition, des commis-voyageurs du malin esprit, qui ne trouvaient plus d'âmes à acheter.

Aidés par un valet infâme, ils pénétrèrent dans la retraite de la noble dame et lui dérobèrent le reste de son trésor . . . en vain lutta-t-elle de toutes ses forces pour sauver le contenu de son coffre, les larrons diaboliques furent les plus forts. Si Ketty avait eu les moyens de faire un signe de croix, ajoute la légende irlandaise, elle les eût mis en fuite, mais ses mains

étaient captives—Le larcin fut effectué. Alors les pauvres sollicitèrent en vain près de Ketty dépouillée, elle ne pouvait plus secourir leur misère;—elle les abandonnait à la tentation. Pourtant il n'y avait plus que huit jours à passer pour que les grains et les fourrages arrivassent en abondance des pays d'Orient. Mais, huit jours, c'était un siècle: huit jours nécessitaient une somme immense pour subvenir aux exigences de la disette, et les pauvres allaient ou expirer dans les angoisses de la faim, ou, reniant les saints maximes de l'Evangile, vendre à vil prix leur âme, le plus beau présent de la munificence du Seigneur tout-puissant.

Et Ketty n'avait plus une obole, car elle avait abandonné son château aux malheureux.

Elle passa douze heures dans les larmes et le deuil, arrachant ses cheveux couleur de soleil et meurtrissant son sein couleur du lis: puis elle se leva résolue, animée par un vif sentiment de désespoir.

Elle se rendit chez les marchands d'âmes.

—Que voulez-vous? dirent-ils.

—Vous achetez des âmes?

—Oui, un peu malgré vous, n'est-ce pas, sainte aux yeux de saphir?

—Aujourd'hui je viens vous proposer un marché, reprit-elle.

—Lequel?

—J'ai une âme à vendre; mais elle est chère.

—Qu'importe si elle est précieuse? l'âme, comme le diamant, s'apprécie à sa blancheur.

—C'est la mienne, dit Ketty.

Les deux envoyés de Satan tressaillirent. Leurs griffes s'allongèrent sous leurs gants de cuir; leurs yeux gris étincelèrent:—l'âme, pure, immaculée, virginale de Ketty! . . . c'était une acquisition inappreciable.

—Gentille dame, combien voulez-vous?

—Cent cinquante mille écus d'or.

—C'est fait, dirent les marchands: et ils tendirent à Ketty un parchemin cacheté de noir, qu'elle signa en frissonnant.

La somme lui fut comptée.

Dès qu'elle fut rentrée, elle dit au majordome:

—Tenez, distribuez ceci. Avec la somme que je vous donne les pauvres attendront la huitaine nécessaire et pas une de leurs âmes ne sera livrée au démon.

Puis elle s'enferma et recommanda qu'on ne vint pas la déranger.

Trois jours se passèrent; elle n'appela pas; elle ne sortit pas.

Quand on ouvrit sa porte, on la trouva raide et froide: elle était morte de douleur.

Mais la vente de cette âme si adorable dans sa charité fut déclarée nulle par le Seigneur: car elle avait sauvé ses concitoyens de la mort éternelle.

Après la huitaine, des vaisseaux nombreux amenèrent à l'Irlande affamée d'immenses provisions de grains.

La famine n'était plus possible. Quant aux marchands, ils disparurent de leur hôtellerie, sans qu'on sût jamais ce qu'ils étaient devenus.

Toutefois, les pêcheurs de la Blackwater prétendent qu'ils sont enchaînés dans une prison souterraine par ordre de Lucifer jusqu'au moment où ils pourront livrer l'âme de Ketty qui leur a échappé. Je vous dis la légende telle que je la sais.

Mais les pauvres l'ont raconté d'âge en âge et les enfants de Cork et de Dublin chantent encore la ballade dont voici les derniers couplets:—

Pour sauver les pauvres qu'elle aime
Ketty donna
Son esprit, sa croyance même:
Satan paya

Cette âme au dévoûment sublime,
En écus d'or,
Disons pour racheter son crime,
Confiteor.

Mais l'ange qui se fit coupable
Par charité
Au séjour d'amour ineffable
Est remonté.
Satan vaincu n'eut pas de prise
Sur ce cœur d'or;
Chantons sous la nef de l'église,
Confiteor.

N'est-ce pas que ce récit, né de l'imagination des poètes catholiques de la verte Erin, est une véritable récit de carême?

The Countess Cathleen was acted in Dublin in 1899, with Mr. Marcus St. John and Mr. Trevor Lowe as the First and Second Demon, Mr. Valentine Grace as Shemus Rua, Master Charles Sefton as Teig, Madame San Carola as Mary, Miss Florence Farr as Aleel, Miss Anna Mather as Oona, Mr. Charles Holmes as the Herdsman, Mr. Jack Wilcox as the Gardener, Mr. Walford as a Peasant, Miss Dorothy Paget as a Spirit, Miss M. Kelly as a Peasant Woman, Mr. T. E. Wilkinson as a Servant, and Miss May Whitty as the Countess Kathleen. They had to face a very vehement opposition stirred up by a politician and a newspaper, the one accusing me in a pamphlet, the other in long articles day after day, of blasphemy because of the language of the demons or of Shemus Rua, and because I made a woman sell her soul and yet escape damnation, and of a lack of patriotism because I made Irish men and women, who, it seems, never did such a thing, sell theirs. The politician or the newspaper persuaded some forty Catholic students

to sign a protest against the play, and a Cardinal, who avowed that he had not read it, to make another, and both politician and newspaper made such obvious appeals to the audience to break the peace, that a score or so of police were sent to the theatre to see that they did not. I had, however, no reason to regret the result, for the stalls, containing almost all that was distinguished in Dublin, and a gallery of artisans alike insisted on the freedom of literature.

After the performance in 1899 I added the love scene between Aleel and the Countess, and in this new form the play was revived in New York by Miss Wycherley as well as being played a good deal in England and America by amateurs. Now at last I have made a complete revision to make it suitable for performance at the Abbey Theatre. The first two scenes are almost wholly new, and throughout the play I have added or left out such passages as a stage experience of some years showed me encumbered the action; the play in its first form having been written before I knew anything of the theatre. I have left the old end, however, in the version printed in the body of this book, because the change for dramatic purposes has been made for no better reason than that audiences—even at the Abbey Theatre—are almost ignorant of Irish mythology—or because a shallow stage made the elaborate vision of armed angels upon a mountain-side impossible. The new end is particularly suited to the Abbey stage, where the stage platform can be brought out in front of the proscenium and have a flight of steps at one side up which the Angel comes, crossing towards the back of the stage at the opposite side. The principal lighting is from two arc lights in the balcony which throw their lights into the faces of the players, making footlights unnecessary. The room at Shemus Rua's house is suggested by a great grey curtain—a colour which becomes full of

rich tints under the stream of light from the arcs. The two or more arches in the third scene permit the use of a gauze. The short front scene before the last is just long enough when played with incidental music to allow the scene set behind it to be changed. The play when played without interval in this way lasts a little over an hour.

The play was performed at the Abbey Theatre for the first time on December 14, 1911, Miss Maire O'Neill taking the part of the Countess, and the last scene from the going out of the Merchants was as follows:—

[MERCHANTS *rush out.* ALEEL *crawls into the middle of the room; the twilight has fallen and gradually darkens as the scene goes on.*

ALEEL. They're rising up—they're rising through the earth,
Fat Asmodel and giddy Belial,
And all the fiends. Now they leap in the air.
But why does Hell's gate creak so? Round and round.
Hither and hither, to and fro they're running.

[*He moves about as though the air was full of spirits.* OONA *enters.*

Crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm.

OONA. Where is the Countess Cathleen? All this day
Her eyes were full of tears, and when for a moment
Her hand was laid upon my hand, it trembled.
And now I do not know where she is gone.

ALEEL. Cathleen has chosen other friends than us,
And they are rising through the hollow world.
Demons are out, old heron.

OONA. God guard her soul.

ALEEL. She's bartered it away this very hour,
As though we two were never in the world.

[*He kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear her words. The* PEASANTS *return. They carry the* COUNTESS CATHLEEN *and lay*

her upon the ground before OONA *and* ALEEL. *She lies there as if dead.*

OONA. O, that so many pitchers of rough clay
Should prosper and the porcelain break in two!

[*She kisses the hands of* CATHLEEN.

A PEASANT. We were under the tree where the path turns
When she grew pale as death and fainted away.

CATHLEEN. O, hold me, and hold me tightly, for the storm
Is dragging me away.

[OONA *takes her in her arms.* A WOMAN *begins to wail.*

PEASANTS. Hush!

PEASANTS. Hush!

PEASANT WOMEN. Hush!

OTHER PEASANT WOMEN. Hush!

CATHLEEN [*half rising*]. Lay all the bags of money in a heap,
And when I am gone, old Oona, share them out
To every man and woman: judge, and give
According to their needs.

A PEASANT WOMAN. And will she give
Enough to keep my children through the dearth?

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN. O, Queen of Heaven, and all you blessed saints,
Let us and ours be lost, so she be shriven.

CATHLEEN. Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel;
I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes
Upon the nest under the eave, before
She wander the loud waters. Do not weep
Too great a while, for there is many a candle
On the High Altar though one fall. Aleel,
Who sang about the dancers of the woods,
That know not the hard burden of the world,
Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell!
And farewell, Oona, you who played with me

And bore me in your arms about the house
When I was but a child—and therefore happy,
Therefore happy even like those that dance.
The storm is in my hair and I must go. [*She dies.*

OONA. Bring me the looking-glass.

[*A* WOMAN *brings it to her out of inner room.* OONA *holds the glass over the lips of* CATHLEEN. *All is silent for a moment, then she speaks in a half-scream.*

O, she is dead!

A PEASANT. She was the great white lily of the world.

A PEASANT. She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN. The little plant I loved is broken in two.

[ALEEL *takes looking-glass from* OONA *and flings it upon floor, so that it is broken in many pieces.*

ALEEL. I shatter you in fragments, for the face
That brimmed you up with beauty is no more;
And die, dull heart, for you that were a mirror
Are but a ball of passionate dust again!
And level earth and plumy sea, rise up!
And haughty sky, fall down!

A PEASANT WOMAN. Pull him upon his knees,
His curses will pluck lightning on our heads.

ALEEL. Angels and devils clash in the middle air,
And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms.
Look, look, a spear has gone through Belial's eye!

[*A winged* ANGEL, *carrying a torch and a sword, enters from the* R. *with eyes fixed upon some distant thing. The* ANGEL *is about to pass out to the* L. *when* ALEEL *speaks. The* ANGEL *stops a moment and turns.*

Look no more on the half-closed gates of Hell,
But speak to me whose mind is smitten of God,

That it may be no more with mortal things:
And tell of her who lies there.

[*The* ANGEL *turns again and is about to go, but is seized by* ALEEL.

Till you speak
You shall not drift into eternity.

THE ANGEL. The light beats down; the gates of pearl are wide.
And she is passing to the floor of peace,
And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair
Has fallen on her face; the Light of Lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

[ALEEL *releases the* ANGEL *and kneels.*

OONA. Tell them to walk upon the floor of peace,
That I would die and go to her I love;
The years like great black oxen tread the world,
And God the herdsman goads them on behind,
And I am broken by their passing feet.

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

O Rose, thou art sick.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

TO
FLORENCE FARR

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

SHAWN BRUIN.

MARY BRUIN.

FATHER HART.

A FAERY CHILD.

The Scene is laid in the Barony of Kilmacowen, in the County of Sligo, and at a remote time.

PREFACE

THIS play contains more of my first experiments in blank verse than any other in my books, for *The Countess Cathleen,* though published before it, was all rewritten for later editions. Many passages that pleased me when I wrote them, and some that please me still, are mere ornament without dramatic value. A revival of the play but a few days ago at the Abbey Theatre enabled me to leave out these and other passages and to test the play without them. I think that it gained greatly, became indeed for the first time tolerable drama; certainly for the first time for many years gave its author pleasure. Amateurs perform it more often than any other play of mine, and I urge them to omit all lines that I have enclosed in brackets. It should sound simple and natural if played with the text I recommend, and it may be that it would read better too, being a more perfect action, but I hesitate to leave out altogether what many people like, what, it may be, I can no longer judge. Somebody, Dr. Todhunter, the dramatic poet, I think, had said in my

hearing that dramatic poetry must be oratorical, and I think that I wrote partly to prove that false; but every now and then I lost courage, as it seems, and remembering that I had some reputation as a lyric poet wrote for the reader of lyrics. When I saw it played with all needless and all mere lyrical passages cut away, I recalled the kind of pleasure that I had sought to create, and at last listened with the hope that this pleasure had reached those about me. Mr. Lennox Robinson, the producer, had kept all the players except the fairy child as still and statuesque as possible, so that the blank verse where there is so little animation seemed their natural utterance.

W. B. YEATS.

March 10.

SCENE.—*A room with a hearth on the floor in the middle of a deep alcove to the Right. There are benches in the alcove and a table; and a crucifix on the wall. The alcove is full of a glow of light from the fire. There is an open door facing the audience to the Left, and to the left of this a bench. Through the door one can see the forest. It is night, but the moon or a late sunset glimmers through the trees and carries the eye far off into a vague, mysterious world.* MAURTEEN BRUIN, SHAWN BRUIN, *and* BRIDGET BRUIN *sit in the alcove at the table or about the fire. They are dressed in the costume of some remote time, and near them sits an old priest,* FATHER HART. *He may be dressed as a friar. There is food and drink upon the table.* MARY BRUIN *stands by the door reading a book. If she looks up she can see through the door into the wood.*

BRIDGET. Because I bid her clean the pots for supper
She took that old book down out of the thatch;
She has been doubled over it ever since.

We should be deafened by her groans and moans
Had she to work as some do, Father Hart;
Get up at dawn like me and mend and scour
Or ride abroad in the boisterous night like you,
The pyx and blessed bread under your arm.

SHAWN. Mother, you are too cross.

BRIDGET. You've married her,
And fear to vex her and so take her part.

MAURTEEN [*to* FATHER HART]. It is but right that youth should side with youth;
She quarrels with my wife a bit at times,
And is too deep just now in the old book!
But do not blame her greatly; [she will grow
As quiet as a puff-ball in a tree
When but the moons of marriage dawn and die
For half a score of times.]

FATHER HART. Their hearts are wild,
As be the hearts of birds, till children come.

BRIDGET. She would not mind the kettle, milk the cow,
Or even lay the knives and spread the cloth.

SHAWN. Mother, if only——

MAURTEEN. Shawn, this is half empty;
Go, bring up the best bottle that we have.

FATHER HART. I *never* saw her read a book before,
What can it be?

MAURTEEN [*to* SHAWN]. What are you waiting for?
You must not shake it when you draw the cork;
It's precious wine, so take you time about it.
[*To Priest.*] [SHAWN *goes.*
[There was a Spaniard wrecked at Ocris Head,
When I was young, and I have still some bottles.]
He cannot bear to hear her blamed; the book
Has lain up in the thatch these fifty years;
My father told me my grandfather wrote it,
And killed a heifer for the binding of it—
[But supper's spread, and we can talk and eat]
It was little good he got out of the book,
Because it filled his house with rambling fiddlers,
And rambling ballad-makers and the like.
[The griddle-bread is there in front of you.]
Colleen, what is the wonder in that book,
That you must leave the bread to cool? Had I
Or had my father read or written books
There were no stocking stuffed with yellow guineas
To come when I am dead to Shawn and you.

FATHER HART. You should not fill your head with foolish dreams.
What are you reading?

MARY. How a Princess Edane,
A daughter of a King of Ireland, heard
A voice singing on a May Eve like this,
And followed half awake and half asleep,
Until she came into the Land of Faery,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue.
And she is still there, busied with a dance
Deep in the dewy shadow of a wood,
[Or where stars walk upon a mountain-top.]

MAURTEEN. Persuade the colleen to put down the book;
My grandfather would mutter just such things,
And he was no judge of a dog or a horse,
And any idle boy could blarney him;
Just speak your mind.

FATHER HART. Put it away, my colleen;
[God spreads the heavens above us like great wings
And gives a little round of deeds and days,
And then come the wrecked angels and set snares,
And bait them with light hopes and heavy dreams,
Until the heart is puffed with pride and goes
Half shuddering and half joyous from God's peace;]
For it was some wrecked angel, blind with tears,

Who flattered Edane's heart with merry words.
My colleen, I have seen some other girls
Restless and ill at ease, but years went by
And they grew like their neighbours and were glad
In minding children, working at the churn,
And gossiping of weddings and of wakes;
[For life moves out of a red flare of dreams
Into a common light of common hours,
Until old age bring the red flare again.]

MAURTEEN. That's true—but she's too young to know it's true.

BRIDGET. She's old enough to know that it is wrong
To mope and idle.

MAURTEEN. I've little blame for her;
She's dull when my big son is in the fields,
And that and maybe this good woman's tongue
Have driven her to hide among her dreams
Like children from the dark under the bedclothes.

BRIDGET. She'd never do a turn if I were silent.

MAURTEEN. And maybe it is natural upon May Eve
To dream of the good people. But tell me, girl,
If you've the branch of blessed quicken wood
That women hang upon the post of the door

That they may send good luck into the house?
Remember they may steal new-married brides
After the fall of twilight on May Eve,
Or what old women mutter at the fire
Is but a pack of lies.

FATHER HART. It may be truth.
We do not know the limit of those powers
God has permitted to the evil spirits
For some mysterious end. You have done right [*to* MARY];
It's well to keep old innocent customs up.

[MARY BRUIN *has taken a bough of quicken wood from a seat and hung it on a nail in the door-post. A girl child strangely dressed, perhaps in faery green, comes out of the wood and takes it away.*

MARY. I had no sooner hung it on the nail
Before a child ran up out of the wind;
She has caught it in her hand and fondled it;
[Her face is pale as water before dawn.]

FATHER HART. Whose child can this be?

MAURTEEN. No one's child at all.
She often dreams that some one has gone by,
When there was nothing but a puff of wind.

MARY. They have taken away the blessed quicken wood,
They will not bring good luck into the house;

Yet I am glad that I was courteous to them,
For are not they, likewise, children of God?

FATHER HART. Colleen, they are the children of the fiend,
And they have power until the end of Time,
When God shall fight with them a great pitched battle
And hack them into pieces.

MARY. He will smile,
Father, perhaps, and open His great door.

FATHER HART. Did but the lawless angels see that door
They would fall, slain by everlasting peace;
And when such angels knock upon our doors,
Who goes with them must drive through the same storm.

[*An arm comes around the door-post and knocks and beckons. It is clearly seen in the silvery light.* MARY BRUIN *goes to door and stands in it for a moment.* MAURTEEN BRUIN *is busy filling* FATHER HART'S *plate.* BRIDGET BRUIN *stirs the fire.*

MARY [*coming to table*]. There's somebody out there that beckoned me
And raised her hand as though it held a cup,
And she was drinking from it, so it may be
That she is thirsty.

[*She takes milk from the table and carries it to the door.*

FATHER HART. That will be the child
That you would have it was no child at all.

BRIDGET. [And maybe, Father, what he said was true;
For there is not another night in the year
So wicked as to-night.

MAURTEEN. Nothing can harm us
While the good Father's underneath our roof.

MARY. A little queer old woman dressed in green.

BRIDGET. The good people beg for milk and fire
Upon May Eve—woe to the house that gives,
For they have power upon it for a year.

MAURTEEN. Hush, woman, hush!

BRIDGET. She's given milk away.
I knew she would bring evil on the house.

MAURTEEN. Who was it?

MARY. Both the tongue and face were strange.

MAURTEEN. Some strangers came last week to Clover Hill;
She must be one of them.]

BRIDGET. I am afraid.

FATHER HART. The Cross will keep all evil from the house
While it hangs there.

MAURTEEN. Come, sit beside me, colleen,
And put away your dreams of discontent,
For I would have you light up my last days,
Like the good glow of the turf; and when I die
You'll be the wealthiest hereabout, for, colleen,
I have a stocking full of yellow guineas
Hidden away where nobody can find it.
BRIDGET. You are the fool of every pretty face,
And I must spare and pinch that my son's wife
May have all kinds of ribbons for her head.
MAURTEEN. Do not be cross; she is a right good girl!
[The butter is by your elbow, Father Hart.
My colleen, have not Fate and Time and Change
Done well for me and for old Bridget there?]
We have a hundred acres of good land,
And sit beside each other at the fire.
I have this reverend Father for my friend,
I look upon your face and my son's face—
We've put his plate by yours—and here he comes,
And brings with him the only thing we have lacked,
Abundance of good wine. [SHAWN *comes in*]. Stir up the fire,

And put new turf upon it till it blaze;
To watch the turf-smoke coiling from the fire,
And feel content and wisdom in your heart,
This is the best of life; [when we are young
We long to tread a way none trod before,
But find the excellent old way through love,
And through the care of children, to the hour
For bidding Fate and Time and Change good-bye.]

[MARY *stands for a moment in the door, and then takes a sod of turf from the fire and goes out through the door.* SHAWN *follows her and meets her coming in.*

SHAWN. What is it draws you to the chill o' the wood?
There is a light among the stems of the trees
That makes one shiver.

MARY. [A little queer old man
Made me a sign to show he wanted fire
To light his pipe.]

BRIDGET. You've given milk and fire
Upon the unluckiest night of the year and brought,
For all you know, evil upon the house.
Before you married you were idle and fine
And went about with ribbons on your head;
And now—no, Father, I will speak my mind—

She is not a fitting wife for any man——

SHAWN. Be quiet, mother!

MAURTEEN. You are much too cross.

MARY. What do I care if I have given this house,
Where I must hear all day a bitter tongue,
Into the power of faeries!

BRIDGET. You know well
How calling the good people by that name,
Or talking of them over much at all,
May bring all kinds of evil on the house.

MARY. Come, faeries, take me out of this dull house!
Let me have all the freedom I have lost;
Work when I will and idle when I will!
Faeries, come take me out of this dull world,
For I would ride with you upon the wind,
[Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,]
And dance upon the mountains like a flame.

FATHER HART. You cannot know the meaning of your words.

MARY. Father, I am right weary of four tongues:
A tongue that is too crafty and too wise,
A tongue that is too godly and too grave,
A tongue that is more bitter than the tide,
And a kind tongue too full of drowsy love,
Of drowsy love and my captivity.

[SHAWN BRUIN *leads her to a seat at the left of the door.*

SHAWN. Do not blame me; I often lie awake
Thinking that all things trouble your bright head.
How beautiful it is—your broad pale forehead
Under a cloudy blossoming of hair!
Sit down beside me here—these are too old,
And have forgotten they were ever young.

MARY. O, you are the great door-post of this house,
And I the branch of blessed quicken wood,
And if I could I'd hang upon the post,
Till I had brought good luck into the house.

[*She would put her arms about him, but looks shyly at the priest and lets her arms fall.*

FATHER HART. My daughter, take his hand—by love alone
God binds us to Himself and to the hearth,
That shuts us from the waste beyond His peace,
From maddening freedom and bewildering light.

SHAWN. Would that the world were mine to give it you,
And not its quiet hearths alone, but even
All that bewilderment of light and freedom,
If you would have it.

MARY. I would take the world
And break it into pieces in my hands
To see you smile watching it crumble away.

SHAWN. Then I would mould a world of fire and dew,
With no one bitter, grave or over wise,
And nothing marred or old to do you wrong,
And crowd the enraptured quiet of the sky
With candles burning to your lonely face.

MARY. Your looks are all the candles that I need.

SHAWN. Once a fly dancing in a beam of the sun,
Or the light wind blowing out of the dawn,
Could fill your heart with dreams none other knew,
But now the indissoluble sacrament
Has mixed your heart that was most proud and cold
With my warm heart for ever; the sun and moon
Must fade and heaven be rolled up like a scroll;
But your white spirit still walks by my spirit.

[*A Voice singing in the wood.*

MAURTEEN. There's some one singing. Why, it's but a child.
It sang, 'The lonely of heart is withered away.'
A strange song for a child, but she sings sweetly.
Listen, listen! [*Goes to door.*

MARY. O, cling close to me,
Because I have said wicked things to-night.

THE VOICE. The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away.
While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air;
For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue;
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,
'When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung
The lonely of heart is withered away!'

MAURTEEN. Being happy, I would have all others happy,
So I will bring her in out of the cold.

[*He brings in the faery child.*

THE CHILD. [I tire of winds and waters and pale lights.

MAURTEEN. And that's no wonder, for when night has fallen]
The wood's a cold and a bewildering place,
But you are welcome here.

THE CHILD. I am welcome here.
[For when I tire of this warm little house]
But there is one here that must away, away.

MAURTEEN. O, listen to her dreamy and strange talk.
Are you not cold?

THE CHILD. I will crouch down beside you,
For I have run a long, long way this night.
BRIDGET. You have a comely shape.
MAURTEEN. Your hair is wet.
BRIDGET. I'll warm your chilly feet.
MAURTEEN. You have come indeed
A long, long way—for I have never seen
Your pretty face—and must be tired and hungry,
Here is some bread and wine.
THE CHILD. The wine is bitter.
Old mother, have you no sweet food for me?
BRIDGET. I have some honey.
[*She goes into the next room.*
MAURTEEN. You have coaxing ways,
The mother was quite cross before you came.
[BRIDGET *returns with the honey and fills a porringer with milk.*
BRIDGET. She is the child of gentle people; look
At her white hands and at her pretty dress.
I've brought you some new milk, but wait a while
And I will put it to the fire to warm,
For things well fitted for poor folk like us
Would never please a high-born child like you.
THE CHILD. From dawn, when you must blow the fire ablaze,

You work your fingers to the bone, old mother.
The young may lie in bed and dream and hope,
But you must work your fingers to the bone
Because your heart is old.

BRIDGET. The young are idle.

THE CHILD. Your memories have made you wise, old father;
The young must sigh through many a dream and hope,
But you are wise because your heart is old.

[BRIDGET *gives her more bread and honey.*

MAURTEEN. O, who would think to find so young a girl
Loving old age and wisdom?

THE CHILD. No more, mother.

MAURTEEN. What a small bite! The milk is ready now. [*Hands it to her.*] What a small sip!

THE CHILD. Put on my shoes, old mother.
For I would like to dance now I have eaten,
The reeds are dancing by Coolaney lake,
And I would like to dance until the reeds
And the white waves have danced themselves asleep.

[BRIDGET *puts on the shoes, and the* CHILD *is about to dance, but suddenly sees the crucifix and shrieks and covers her eyes.*

What is that ugly thing on the black cross?

FATHER HART. You cannot know how naughty your words are!
That is our Blessed Lord.

THE CHILD. Hide it away!

BRIDGET. I have begun to be afraid again.

THE CHILD. Hide it away!

MAURTEEN. That would be wickedness!

BRIDGET. That would be sacrilege!

THE CHILD. The tortured thing!
Hide it away!

MAURTEEN. Her parents are to blame.

FATHER HART. That is the image of the Son of God.

THE CHILD [*caressing him*]. Hide it away, hide it away!

MAURTEEN. No, no.

FATHER HART. Because you are so young and like a bird,
That must take fright at every stir of the leaves.
I will go take it down.

THE CHILD. Hide it away!
And cover it out of sight and out of mind!

[FATHER HART *takes crucifix from wall and carries it towards inner room.*

FATHER HART. Since you have come into this barony,
I will instruct you in our blessed faith;

And being so keen witted you'll soon learn.
[*To the others.*
We must be tender to all budding things,
Our Maker let no thought of Calvary
Trouble the morning stars in their first song.
[*Puts crucifix in inner room.*

THE CHILD. Here is level ground for dancing; I will dance.
[*Sings.*]
The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away.
[*She dances.*

MARY [*to* SHAWN]. Just now when she came near I thought I heard
Other small steps beating upon the floor,
And a faint music blowing in the wind,
Invisible pipes giving her feet the tune.

SHAWN. I heard no steps but hers.

MARY. I hear them now,
The unholy powers are dancing in the house.

MAURTEEN. Come over here, and if you promise me
Not to talk wickedly of holy things
I will give you something.

THE CHILD. Bring it me, old father.

MAURTEEN. Here are some ribbons that I bought in the town
For my son's wife—but she will let me give them

To tie up that wild hair the winds have tumbled.

THE CHILD. Come, tell me, do you love me?

MAURTEEN. Yes, I love you.

THE CHILD. Ah, but you love this fireside. Do you love me?

FATHER HART. When the Almighty puts so great a share
Of His own ageless youth into a creature,
To look is but to love.

THE CHILD. But you love Him?

BRIDGET. She is blaspheming.

THE CHILD. And do you love me too?

MARY. I do not know.

THE CHILD. You love that young man there,
Yet I could make you ride upon the winds,
[Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,]
And dance upon the mountains like a flame.

MARY. Queen of Angels and kind saints defend us!
Some dreadful thing will happen. A while ago
She took away the blessed quicken wood.

FATHER HART. You fear because of her unmeasured prattle;
She knows no better. Child, how old are you?

THE CHILD. When winter sleep is abroad my hair grows thin,

My feet unsteady. When the leaves awaken
My mother carries me in her golden arms;
I'll soon put on my womanhood and marry
The spirits of wood and water, but who can tell
When I was born for the first time? I think
I am much older than the eagle cock
[That blinks and blinks on Ballygawley Hill,]
And he is the oldest thing under the moon.

FATHER HART. O she is of the faery people.

THE CHILD. One called,
I sent my messengers for milk and fire,
She called again and after that I came.

[*All except* SHAWN *and* MARY BRUIN *gather behind the priest for protection.*

SHAWN [*rising*]. Though you have made all these obedient,
You have not charmed my sight and won from me
A wish or gift to make you powerful;
I'll turn you from the house.

FATHER HART. No, I will face her.

THE CHILD. Because you took away the crucifix
I am so mighty that there's none can pass,
Unless I will it, where my feet have danced
Or where I've whirled my finger-tops.

[SHAWN *tries to approach her and cannot.*

MAURTEEN. Look, look!
There something stops him—look how he moves his hands
As though he rubbed them on a wall of glass!

FATHER HART. I will confront this mighty spirit alone;
Be not afraid, the Father is with us,
[The Holy Martyrs and the Innocents,
The adoring Magi in their coats of mail,]
And He who died and rose on the third day,
[And all the nine angelic hierarchies.]

[*The* CHILD *kneels upon the settle beside* MARY *and puts her arms about her.*

Cry, daughter, to the Angels and the Saints.

THE CHILD. You shall go with me, newly-married bride.
And gaze upon a merrier multitude.
[White-armed Nuala, Aengus of the Birds,
Feacra of the hurtling foam, and him
Who is the ruler of the Western Host,
Finvarra, and their Land of Heart's Desire,]
Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,
But joy is wisdom, Time an endless song.
I kiss you and the world begins to fade.

SHAWN. Awake out of that trance—and cover up
Your eyes and ears.

FATHER HART. She must both look and listen,
For only the soul's choice can save her now.
Come over to me, daughter; stand beside me;
Think of this house and of your duties in it.

THE CHILD. Stay and come with me, newly-married bride,
For if you hear him you grow like the rest;
Bear children, cook, and bend above the churn,
And wrangle over butter, fowl, and eggs,
Until at last, grown old and bitter of tongue,
You're crouching there and shivering at the grave.

FATHER HART. Daughter, I point you out the way to Heaven.

THE CHILD. But I can lead you, newly-married bride,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue,
And where kind tongues bring no captivity;
For we are but obedient to the thoughts
That drift into the mind at a wink of the eye.

FATHER HART. By the dear Name of the One crucified,
I bid you, Mary Bruin, come to me.

THE CHILD. I keep you in the name of your own heart.

FATHER HART. It is because I put away
the crucifix
That I am nothing, and my power is
nothing.
I'll bring it here again.
MAURTEEN [*clinging to him*]. No.
BRIDGET. Do not leave us.
FATHER HART. O, let me go before it is
too late;
It is my sin alone that brought it all.
[*Singing outside.*
THE CHILD. I hear them sing, 'Come,
newly-married bride,
Come, to the woods and waters and pale
lights.'
MARY. I will go with you.
FATHER HART. She is lost, alas!
THE CHILD [*standing by the door*]. But
clinging mortal hope must fall from
you,
For we who ride the winds, run on the waves,
And dance upon the mountains are more
light
Than dewdrops on the banner of the dawn.
MARY. O, take me with you.
SHAWN. Beloved, I will keep you.
I've more than words, I have these arms to
hold you,
Nor all the faery host, do what they please,
Shall ever make me loosen you from these
arms.

MARY. Dear face! Dear voice!

THE CHILD. Come, newly-married bride.

MARY. I always loved her world—and yet —and yet——

THE CHILD. White bird, white bird, come with me, little bird.

MARY. She calls me!

THE CHILD. Come with me, little bird.

[*Distant dancing figures appear in the wood.*

MARY. I can hear songs and dancing.

SHAWN. Stay with me.

MARY. I think that I would stay—and yet—and yet——

THE CHILD. Come, little bird with crest of gold.

MARY [*very softly*]. And yet——

THE CHILD. Come, little bird with silver feet!

[MARY BRUIN *dies, and the* CHILD *goes.*

SHAWN. She is dead!

BRIDGET. Come from that image; body and soul are gone.
You have thrown your arms about a drift of leaves,
Or bole of an ash-tree changed into her image.

FATHER HART. Thus do the spirits of evil snatch their prey,
Almost out of the very hand of God;

And day by day their power is more and more,
And men and women leave old paths, for pride
Comes knocking with thin knuckles on the heart.

[*Outside there are dancing figures, and it may be a white bird, and many voices singing:*

The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away;
[While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air;
For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue;
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say—
'When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung,
The lonely of heart is withered away.']

NOTE

'The Land of Heart's Desire'

This little play was produced at the Avenue Theatre in the spring of 1894, with the following cast:—Maurteen Bruin, Mr. James Welch; Shawn Bruin, Mr. A. E. W. Mason; Father Hart, Mr. G. R. Foss; Bridget Bruin, Miss Charlotte Morland; Mary Bruin, Miss Winifred Fraser; A Faery Child, Miss Dorothy Paget. It ran for a little over six weeks. It was revived in America in 1901, when it was taken on tour by Mrs. Lemoyne. It has been played two or three times professionally since then in America, and a great many times in England and America by amateurs. Till lately it was not part of the repertory of the Abbey Theatre, for I had grown to dislike it without knowing what I disliked in it. This winter, however, I have made many revisions, and now it plays well enough to give me pleasure. It is printed in this book in the new form, which was acted for the first time on February 22, 1912, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. At the Abbey Theatre, where the platform of the stage comes out in front of the curtain, the curtain falls before the priest's last words. He remains outside the curtain and the words are spoken to the audience like an epilogue.—W. B. Y., 1912.

When revived last spring the passages between brackets were left out.—W. B. Y., 1923.

FOUR PLAYS FOR DANCERS

PREFACE

Two of these plays must be opened by the unfolding and folding of the cloth, a substitute for the rising of the curtain, and all must be closed by it. The others, *The Dreaming of the Bones* and *Calvary,* should have the same opening, unless played after plays of the same kind, when it may seem a needless repetition. All must be played to the accompaniment of drum and zither and flute, but on no account must the words be spoken 'through music' in the fashionable way; and the players must move a little stiffly and gravely like marionettes and, I think, to the accompaniment of drum taps. I felt, however, during the performance of *The Hawk's Well,* the only one played up to this, that there was much to discover. Should I make a serious attempt, which I may not, being rather tired of the theatre, to arrange and supervise performances, the dancing will give me most trouble, for I know but vaguely what I want. I do not want any existing form of stage dancing, but something with a smaller gamut of

expression, something more reserved, more self-controlled, as befits performers within arm's reach of their audience.

Mr. Edmund Dulac designed the masks and costumes used in the first performance of *The Hawk's Well.* The beautiful mask of Cuchulain may, I think, serve for Dervorgilla, and if I write plays and organise performances on any scale and with any system, I shall hope for a small number of typical masks, each capable of use in several plays. The face of the speaker should be as much a work of art as the lines that he speaks or the costume that he wears, that all may be as artificial as possible. Perhaps in the end one would write plays for certain masks. If some fine sculptor should create for my *Calvary,* for instance, the masks of Judas, of Lazarus, and of Christ, would not this suggest other plays now, or many generations from now, and possess one cannot tell what philosophical virility? The mask, apart from its beauty, may suggest new situations at a moment when the old ones seem exhausted; *The Only Jealousy of Emer* was written to find what dramatic effect one could get out of a mask, changed while the player remains upon the stage to suggest a change of personality. At the end of this book there is some music by Mr. Rummell, which my friends tell me is both difficult

and beautiful, for *The Dreaming of the Bones*. It will require, I am told, either a number of flutes of which the flute-player will pick now one, now another, or an elaborate modern flute, which would not look in keeping. I prefer the first suggestion. I notice that Mr. Rummell has written no music for the dance, and I have some vague memory that when we talked it over in Paris he felt that he could not without the dancer's help. There is also music for *The Hawk's Well* by Mr. Dulac, which is itself an exposition of method, for it was written after a number of rehearsals and for instruments that have great pictorial effect. . . .

At the Hawk's Well and *The Only Jealousy of Emer* are the first and last plays of a series of four dealing with Cuchulain's life (see *Plays in Prose and Verse*).

That I might write *The Dreaming of the Bones*, Mr. W. A. Henderson with great kindness wrote out for me all historical allusions to 'Dervorgilla'; but neither that nor any of these plays could have existed if Mr. Edmund Dulac had not taught me the value and beauty of the mask and rediscovered how to design and make it.

W. B. YEATS.

July 1920.

The Guardian of the Well in 'At the Hawk's Well.'

AT THE HAWK'S WELL

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THREE MUSICIANS *(their faces made up to resemble masks).*

THE GUARDIAN OF THE WELL *(with face made up to resemble a mask).*

AN OLD MAN *(wearing a mask).*

A YOUNG MAN *(wearing a mask).*

The Time—the Irish Heroic Age.

The stage is any bare space before a wall against which stands a patterned screen. A drum and a gong and a zither have been laid close to the screen before the play begins. If necessary, they can be carried in, after the audience is seated, by the FIRST MUSICIAN, *who also can attend to the lights if there is any special lighting. We had two lanterns upon posts—designed by Mr. Dulac—at the outer corners of the stage, but they did not give enough light, and we found it better to play by the light of a large chandelier. Indeed, I think, so far as my present experience goes, that the most effective lighting is the lighting we are most accustomed to in our rooms. These masked players seem stranger when there is no mechanical means of separating them from us. The* FIRST MUSICIAN *carries with him a folded black cloth and goes to the centre of the stage towards the front and stands motionless, the folded cloth hanging from between his hands. The two musicians enter and, after standing a moment at either side of the stage, go towards him and slowly unfold the cloth, singing as they do so:*

I call to the eye of the mind
A well long choked up and dry
And boughs long stripped by the wind,
And I call to the mind's eye
Pallor of an ivory face,
Its lofty dissolute air,
A man climbing up to a place
The salt sea wind has swept bare.

As they unfold the cloth, they go backward a little so that the stretched cloth and the wall make a triangle with the FIRST MUSICIAN *at the apex supporting the centre of the cloth. On the black cloth is a gold pattern suggesting a hawk. The* SECOND *and* THIRD MUSICIANS *now slowly fold up the cloth again, pacing with a rhythmic movement of the arms towards the* FIRST MUSICIAN *and singing:*

What were his life soon done!
Would he lose by that or win?
A mother that saw her son
Doubled over a speckled shin,
Cross-grained with ninety years,
Would cry, 'How little worth
Were all my hopes and fears
And the hard pain of his birth!'

The words 'a speckled shin' are familiar to readers of Irish legendary stories in descriptions of old men bent double over the

Design for Black Cloth used in 'At the Hawk's Well.'

fire. While the cloth has been spread out, the GUARDIAN OF THE WELL *has entered and is now crouching upon the ground. She is entirely covered by a black cloak. The three musicians have taken their places against the wall beside their instruments of music; they will accompany the movements of the players with gong or drum or zither.*

FIRST MUSICIAN [*singing*]

The boughs of the hazel shake,
The sun goes down in the west.

SECOND MUSICIAN [*singing*]

The heart would be always awake,
The heart would turn to its rest.

[*They now go to one side of the stage rolling up the cloth. A* GIRL *has taken her place by a square blue cloth representing a well. She is motionless.*

FIRST MUSICIAN [*speaking*]. Night falls;
The mountain-side grows dark;
The withered leaves of the hazel
Half-choke the dry bed of the well;
The guardian of the well is sitting
Upon the old grey stone at its side,
Worn out from raking its dry bed,
Worn out from gathering up the leaves.
Her heavy eyes

Know nothing, or but look upon stone.
The wind that blows out of the sea
Turns over the heaped-up leaves at her side;
They rustle and diminish.

SECOND MUSICIAN. I am afraid of this place.

BOTH MUSICIANS [*singing*]

'Why should I sleep?' the heart cries.
'For the wind, the salt wind, the sea wind,
Is beating a cloud through the skies;
I would wander always like the wind.'

An OLD MAN *enters through the audience.*

FIRST MUSICIAN [*speaking*]. That old man climbs up hither,
Who has been watching by his well
These fifty years.
He is all doubled up with age;
The old thorn-trees are doubled so
Among the rocks where he is climbing.

[*The* OLD MAN *stands for a moment motionless by the side of the stage with bowed head. He lifts his head at the sound of a drum tap. He goes towards the front of the stage moving to the taps of the drum. He crouches and moves his hands as if making a fire. His movements, like those of the other*

Musician in 'At the Hawk's Well.'

persons of the play, suggest a marionette.

FIRST MUSICIAN [*speaking*]. He has made a little heap of leaves;
He lays the dry sticks on the leaves
And, shivering with cold, he has taken up
The fire-stick and socket from its hole.
He whirls it round to get a flame;
And now the dry sticks take the fire
And now the fire leaps up and shines
Upon the hazels and the empty well.

MUSICIANS [*singing*]

'O wind, O salt wind, O sea wind!'
Cries the heart, 'it is time to sleep;
Why wander and nothing to find?
Better grow old and sleep.'

OLD MAN [*speaking*]. Why don't you speak to me? Why don't you say,
'Are you not weary gathering those sticks?
Are not your fingers cold?' You have not one word,
While yesterday you spoke three times. You said:
'The well is full of hazel leaves.' You said:
'The wind is from the west.' And after that:
'If there is rain it's likely there'll be mud.'
To-day you are as stupid as a fish,

No, worse, worse, being less lively and as dumb. [*He goes nearer.*
Your eyes are dazed and heavy. If the Sidhe
Must have a guardian to clean out the well
And drive the cattle off, they might choose somebody
That can be pleasant and companionable
Once in the day. Why do you stare like that?
You had that glassy look about the eyes
Last time it happened. Do you know anything?
It is enough to drive an old man crazy
To look all day upon these broken rocks,
And ragged thorns, and that one stupid face,
And speak and get no answer.

YOUNG MAN [*who has entered through the audience during the last speech*]. Then speak to me,
For youth is not more patient than old age;
And though I have trod the rocks for half a day
I cannot find what I am looking for.

OLD MAN. Who speaks?
Who comes so suddenly into this place
Where nothing thrives? If I may judge by the gold
On head and feet and glittering in your coat,

Old Man in 'At the Hawk's Well.'

You are not of those who hate the living world.

YOUNG MAN. I am named Cuchulain, I am Sualtam's son.

OLD MAN. I have never heard that name.

CUCHULAIN. It is not unknown.
I have an ancient house beyond the sea.

OLD MAN. What mischief brings you hither—you are like those
Who are crazy for the shedding of men's blood,
And for the love of women?

YOUNG MAN. A rumour has led me,
A story told over the wine towards dawn.
I rose from table, found a boat, spread sail
And with a lucky wind under the sail
Crossed waves that have seemed charmed, and found this shore.

OLD MAN. There is no house to sack among these hills
Nor beautiful woman to be carried off.

YOUNG MAN. You should be native here, for that rough tongue
Matches the barbarous spot. You can, it may be,
Lead me to what I seek, a well wherein
Three hazels drop their nuts and withered leaves,
And where a solitary girl keeps watch
Among grey boulders. He who drinks, they say,

Of that miraculous water lives for ever.

OLD MAN. And are there not before your eyes at the instant
Grey boulders and a solitary girl
And three stripped hazels?

YOUNG MAN. But there is no well.

OLD MAN. Can you see nothing yonder?

YOUNG MAN. I but see
A hollow among stones half-full of leaves.

OLD MAN. And do you think so great a gift is found
By no more toil than spreading out a sail,
And climbing a steep hill? Oh, folly of youth,
Why should that hollow place fill up for you,
That will not fill for me? I have lain in wait
For more than fifty years to find it empty,
Or but to find the stupid wind of the sea
Drive round the perishable leaves.

YOUNG MAN. So it seems
There is some moment when the water fills it.

OLD MAN. A secret moment that the holy shades
That dance upon the desolate mountain know,
And not a living man, and when it comes
The water has scarce plashed before it is gone.

Mask for Old Man in 'At the Hawk's Well.'

YOUNG MAN. I will stand here and wait.
Why should the luck
Of Sualtam's son desert him now? For never
Have I had long to wait for anything.
OLD MAN. No! Go from this accursed place, this place
Belongs to me, that girl there and those others,
Deceivers of men.
YOUNG MAN. And who are you who rail
Upon those dancers that all others bless?
OLD MAN. One whom the dancers cheat. I came like you
When young in body and in mind, and blown
By what had seemed to me a lucky sail.
The well was dry, I sat upon its edge,
I waited the miraculous flood, I waited
While the years passed and withered me away.
I have snared the birds for food and eaten grass
And drunk the rain, and neither in dark nor shine
Wandered too far away to have heard the plash,
And yet the dancers have deceived me. Thrice
I have awakened from a sudden sleep
To find the stones were wet.

YOUNG MAN. My luck is strong,
It will not leave me waiting, nor will they
That dance among the stones put me asleep;
If I grow drowsy I can pierce my foot.
OLD MAN. No, do not pierce it, for the foot is tender,
It feels pain much. But find your sail again
And leave the well to me, for it belongs
To all that's old and withered.
YOUNG MAN. No, I stay.
[*The* GIRL *gives the cry of the hawk.*
There is that bird again.
OLD MAN. There is no bird.
YOUNG MAN. It sounded like the sudden cry of a hawk,
But there's no wing in sight. As I came hither
A great grey hawk swept down out of the sky,
And though I have good hawks, the best in the world
I had fancied, I have not seen its like. It flew
As though it would have torn me with its beak,
Or blinded me, smiting with that great wing.
I had to draw my sword to drive it off,
And after that it flew from rock to rock.
I pelted it with stones, a good half-hour,
And just before I had turned the big rock there

Mask for Young Man in 'At the Hawk's Well.'

And seen this place, it seemed to vanish
away.
Could I but find a means to bring it down
I'd hood it.
OLD MAN. The woman of the Sidhe herself,
The mountain witch, the unappeasable
shadow.
She is always flitting upon this mountain-side,
To allure or to destroy. When she has
shown
Herself to the fierce women of the hills
Under that shape they offer sacrifice
And arm for battle. There falls a curse
On all who have gazed in her unmoistened
eyes;
So get you gone while you have that proud
step
And confident voice, for not a man alive
Has so much luck that he can play with it.
Those that have long to live should fear
her most,
The old are cursed already. That curse
may be
Never to win a woman's love and keep it;
Or always to mix hatred in the love;
Or it may be that she will kill your children,
That you will find them, their throats torn
and bloody,
Or you will be so maddened that you kill
them
With your own hand.

YOUNG MAN. Have you been set down there
To threaten all who come, and scare them off?
You seem as dried up as the leaves and sticks,
As though you had no part in life.
[GIRL *gives hawk cry again.*
That cry!
There is that cry again. That woman made it,
But why does she cry out as the hawk cries?

OLD MAN. It was her mouth, and yet not she, that cried.
It was that shadow cried behind her mouth;
And now I know why she has been so stupid
All the day through, and had such heavy eyes.
Look at her shivering now, the terrible life
Is slipping through her veins. She is possessed.
Who knows whom she will murder or betray
Before she awakes in ignorance of it all,
And gathers up the leaves! But they'll be wet;
The water will have come and gone again;
That shivering is the sign. Oh, get you gone,
At any moment now I shall hear it bubble.

Young Man in 'At the Hawk's Well.'

If you are good you will leave it. I am old,
And if I do not drink it now, will never;
I have been watching all my life and maybe
Only a little cupful will bubble up.

YOUNG MAN. I'll take it in my hands.
We shall both drink,
And even if there are but a few drops,
Share them.

OLD MAN. But swear that I may drink
the first;
The young are greedy, and if you drink the
first
You'll drink it all. Ah, you have looked
at her;
She has felt your gaze and turned her eyes
on us;
I cannot bear her eyes, they are not of this
world,
Nor moist, nor faltering; they are no girl's
eyes.

[*He covers his head. The* GUARDIAN OF THE WELL *throws off her cloak and rises. Her dress under the cloak suggests a hawk.*

YOUNG MAN. Why do you gaze upon me
with the eyes of a hawk?
I am not afraid of you, bird, woman, or
witch.

[*He goes to the side of the well, which the* GUARDIAN OF THE WELL *has left.*

Do what you will, I shall not leave this
place
Till I have grown immortal like yourself.
[*He has sat down, the* GIRL *has begun to dance, moving like a hawk. The* OLD MAN *sleeps. The dance goes on for some time.*

FIRST MUSICIAN [*singing or half-singing*]
O God, protect me
From a horrible deathless body
Sliding through the veins of a sudden.
[*The dance goes on for some time. The* YOUNG MAN *rises slowly.*
FIRST MUSICIAN [*speaking*]. The madness
has laid hold upon him now,
For he grows pale and staggers to his feet.
[*The dance goes on.*
YOUNG MAN. Run where you will,
Grey bird, you shall be perched upon my
wrist,
Some were called queens and yet have been
perched there. [*The dance goes on.*
FIRST MUSICIAN [*speaking*]. I have heard
water plash! it comes, it comes;
It glitters among the stones and he has
heard the plash;
Look, he has turned his head.
[*The Hawk has gone out. The* YOUNG MAN *drops his spear as if in a dream and goes out.*

MUSICIANS [*singing*]

He has lost what may not be found
Till men heap his burial mound
And all the history ends.
He might have lived at his ease,
An old dog's head on his knees,
Among his children and friends.

[*The* OLD MAN *creeps up to the well.*

OLD MAN. The accursed shadows have deluded me,
The stones are dark and yet the well is empty;
The water flowed and emptied while I slept;
You have deluded me my whole life through.
Accursed dancers, you have stolen my life.
That there should be such evil in a shadow!

YOUNG MAN [*entering*]. She has fled from me and hidden in the rocks.

OLD MAN. She has but led you from the fountain. Look!
The stones and leaves are dark where it has flowed,
Yet there is not a drop to drink.

[*The Musicians cry 'Eofe!' Eofe!' and strike gong.*

YOUNG MAN. What are those cries?
What is that sound that runs along the hill?
Who are they that beat a sword upon a shield?

OLD MAN. She has roused up the fierce women of the hills,
Eofe, and all her troop, to take your life,
And never till you are lying in the earth
Can you know rest.

YOUNG MAN. The clash of arms again!

OLD MAN. Oh, do not go! The mountain is accursed;
Stay with me, I have nothing more to lose,
I do not now deceive you.

YOUNG MAN. I will face them.

[*He goes out no longer as if in a dream, but shouldering his spear and calling:*

He comes! Cuchulain, son of Sualtam, comes!

[*The Musicians stand up; one goes to centre with folded cloth. The others unfold it. While they do so they sing. During the singing, and while hidden by the cloth, the* OLD MAN *goes out. When the play is performed with Mr. Dulac's music, the Musicians do not rise or unfold the cloth till after they have sung the words* 'a bitter life.'

[*Songs for the unfolding and folding of the cloth.*]

Come to me, human faces,
Familiar memories;

I have found hateful eyes
Among the desolate places,
Unfaltering, unmoistened eyes.

Folly alone I cherish,
I choose it for my share;
Being but a mouthful of air,
I am content to perish;
I am but a mouthful of sweet air.

O lamentable shadows,
Obscurity of strife,
I choose a pleasant life,
Among indolent meadows;
Wisdom must live a bitter life.

[*They then fold up the cloth, singing.*

'The man that I praise,'
Cries out the empty well,
'Lives all his days
Where a hand on the bell
Can call the milch cows
To the comfortable door of his house.
Who but an idiot would praise
Dry stones in a well?

'The man that I praise,'
Cries out the leafless tree,
'Has married and stays
By an old hearth, and he

On naught has set store
But children and dogs on the floor.
Who but an idiot would praise
A withered tree?'

[*They go out.*

THE ONLY JEALOUSY OF EMER

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THREE MUSICIANS *(their faces made up to resemble masks).*

THE GHOST OF CUCHULAIN *(wearing a mask).*

THE FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN *(wearing a mask).*

EMER, EITHNE INGUBA *(masked, or their faces made up to resemble masks).*

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE *(wearing a mask).*

Enter Musicians, who are dressed and made up as in 'At the Hawk's Well.' They have the same musical instruments, which can either be already upon the stage or be brought in by the FIRST MUSICIAN *before he stands in the centre with the cloth between his hands, or by a player when the cloth has been unfolded. The stage as before can be against the wall of any room, and the same black cloth can be used as in 'At the Hawk's Well.'*

[*Song for the folding and unfolding of the cloth.*]

FIRST MUSICIAN. A woman's beauty is like a white
Frail bird, like a white sea-bird alone
At daybreak after stormy night
Between two furrows upon the ploughed land:
A sudden storm and it was thrown
Between dark furrows upon the ploughed land.
How many centuries spent
The sedentary soul

In toils of measurement
Beyond eagle or mole,
Beyond hearing or seeing,
Or Archimedes guess,
To raise into being
That loveliness?

A strange unserviceable thing,
A fragile, exquisite, pale shell,
That the vast troubled waters bring
To the loud sands before day has broken.
The storm arose and suddenly fell
Amid the dark before day had broken.
What death? what discipline?
What bonds no man could unbind
Being imagined within
The labyrinth of the mind,
What pursuing or fleeing,
What wounds, what bloody press
Dragged into being
This loveliness?

[*When the cloth is folded again the Musicians take their place against the wall. The folding of the cloth shows on one side of the stage the curtained bed or litter on which lies a man in his grave-clothes. He wears an heroic mask. Another man with exactly similar clothes and mask crouches near the front.* EMER *is sitting beside the bed.*

FIRST MUSICIAN [*speaking*]. I call before
the eyes a roof
With cross-beams darkened by smoke;
A fisher's net hangs from a beam,
A long oar lies against the wall.
I call up a poor fisher's house;
A man lies dead or swooning,
That amorous man,
That amorous, violent man, renowned
Cuchulain,
Queen Emer at his side.
At her own bidding all the rest have gone;
But now one comes on hesitating feet,
Young Eithne Inguba, Cuchulain's mistress.
She stands a moment in the open door,
Beyond the open door the bitter sea,
The shining, bitter sea, is crying out,
[*singing*] White shell, white wing!
I will not choose for my friend
A frail unserviceable thing
That drifts and dreams, and but knows
That waters are without end
And that wind blows.

EMER [*speaking*]. Come hither, come sit
down beside the bed;
You need not be afraid, for I myself
Sent for you, Eithne Inguba.

EITHNE INGUBA. No, Madam,
I have too deeply wronged you to sit there.

EMER. Of all the people in the world
we two,

And we alone, may watch together here,
Because we have loved him best.

EITHNE INGUBA. And is he dead?

EMER. Although they have dressed him out in his grave-clothes
And stretched his limbs, Cuchulain is not dead;
The very heavens when that day's at hand,
So that his death may not lack ceremony,
Will throw out fires, and the earth grow red with blood.
There shall not be a scullion but foreknows it
Like the world's end.

EITHNE INGUBA. How did he come to this?

EMER. Towards noon in the assembly of the kings
He met with one who seemed a while most dear.
The kings stood around; some quarrel was blown up;
He drove him out and killed him on the shore
At Baile's tree, and he who was so killed
Was his own son begot of some wild woman
When he was young, or so I have heard it said;
And thereupon, knowing what man he had killed,
And being mad with sorrow, he ran out;
And after, to his middle in the foam

With shield before him and with sword in hand,
He fought the deathless sea. The kings looked on
And not a king dared stretch an arm, or even
Dared call his name, but all stood wondering
In that dumb stupor like cattle in a gale,
Until at last, as though he had fixed his eyes
On a new enemy, he waded out
Until the water had swept over him;
But the waves washed his senseless image up
And laid it at this door.

EITHNE INGUBA. How pale he looks!

EMER. He is not dead.

EITHNE INGUBA. You have not kissed his lips
Nor laid his head upon your breast.

EMER. It may be
An image has been put into his place,
A sea-borne log bewitched into his likeness,
Or some stark horseman grown too old to ride
Among the troops of Mananan, Son of the Sea,
Now that his joints are stiff.

EITHNE INGUBA. Cry out his name.
All that are taken from our sight, they say,
Loiter amid the scenery of their lives
For certain hours or days, and should he hear

He might, being angry, drive the changeling out.

EMER. It is hard to make them hear amid their darkness,

And it is long since I could call him home;
I am but his wife, but if you cry aloud
With that sweet voice that is so dear to him
He cannot help but listen.

EITHNE INGUBA. He loves me best,
Being his newest love, but in the end
Will love the woman best who loved him first
And loved him through the years when love seemed lost.

EMER. I have that hope, the hope that some day somewhere
We'll sit together at the hearth again.

EITHNE INGUBA. Women like me, the violent hour passed over,
Are flung into some corner like old nutshells.
Cuchulain, listen.

EMER. No, not yet, for first
I'll cover up his face to hide the sea;
And throw new logs upon the hearth and stir
The half-burnt logs until they break in flame.
Old Mananan's unbridled horses come
Out of the sea, and on their backs his horsemen;
But all the enchantments of the dreaming foam

Dread the hearth-fire.

[*She pulls the curtains of the bed so as to hide the sick man's face, that the actor may change his mask unseen. She goes to one side of platform and moves her hand as though putting logs on a fire and stirring it into a blaze. While she makes these movements the Musicians play, marking the movements with drum and flute perhaps.*

Having finished she stands beside the imaginary fire at a distance from CUCHULAIN *and* EITHNE INGUBA.

Call on Cuchulain now.

EITHNE INGUBA. Can you not hear my voice?

EMER. Bend over him;
Call out dear secrets till you have touched his heart
If he lies there; and if he is not there
Till you have made him jealous.

EITHNE INGUBA. Cuchulain, listen.

EMER. Those words sound timidly; to be afraid
Because his wife is but three paces off,
When there is so great a need, were but to prove
The man that chose you made but a poor choice:

We're but two women struggling with the sea.

EITHNE INGUBA. O my beloved, pardon me, that I
Have been ashamed and you in so great need.
I have never sent a message or called out,
Scarce had a longing for your company
But you have known and come; and if indeed
You are lying there, stretch out your arms and speak;
Open your mouth and speak, for to this hour
My company has made you talkative.
What ails your tongue, or what has closed your ears?
Our passion had not chilled when we were parted
On the pale shore under the breaking dawn.
He cannot speak: or else his ears are closed
And no sound reaches him.

EMER. Then kiss that image;
The pressure of your mouth upon his mouth
May reach him where he is.

EITHNE INGUBA [*starting back*]. It is no man.
I felt some evil thing that dried my heart
When my lips touched it.

EMER. No, his body stirs;

The pressure of your mouth has called him
home;
He has thrown the changeling out.
EITHNE INGUBA [*going further off*]. Look
at that arm;
That arm is withered to the very socket.
EMER [*going up to the bed*]. What do you
come for; and from where?
FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. I have come
From Mananan's court upon a bridleless
horse.
EMER. What one among the Sidhe has
dared to lie
Upon Cuchulain's bed and take his image?
FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. I am named
Bricriu—not the man—that Bricriu,
Maker of discord among gods and men,
Called Bricriu of the Sidhe.
EMER. Come for what purpose?
FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN [*sitting up parting
curtain and showing its distorted face,
as* EITHNE INGUBA *goes out*]. I show
my face and everything he loves
Must fly away.
EMER. You people of the wind
Are full of lying speech and mockery:
I have not fled your face.
FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. You are not loved.
EMER. And therefore have no dread to
meet your eyes
And to demand him of you.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. For that I have come.
You have but to pay the price and he is free.
EMER. Do the Sidhe bargain?
FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. When they would free a captive
They take in ransom a less valued thing.
The fisher when some knowledgeable man
Restores to him his wife, or son, or daughter,
Knows he must lose a boat or net, or it may be
The cow that gives his children milk; and some
Have offered their own lives. I do not ask
Your life, or any valuable thing;
You spoke but now of the mere chance that some day
You'd be the apple of his eye again
When old and ailing, but renounce that chance
And he shall live again.
EMER. I do not question
But you have brought ill luck on all he loves;
And now, because I am thrown beyond your power
Unless your words are lies, you come to bargain.
FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. You loved your mastery, when but newly married,
And I love mine for all my withered arm;

You have but to put yourself into that
power
And he shall live again.

EMER. No, never, never.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. You dare not be
accursed, yet he has dared.

EMER. I have but two joyous thoughts,
two things I prize,
A hope, a memory, and now you claim that
hope.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. He'll never sit
beside you at the hearth
Or make old bones, but die of wounds and
toil
On some far shore or mountain, a strange
woman
Beside his mattress.

EMER. You ask for my one hope
That you may bring your curse on all about
him.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. You've watched
his loves and you have not been jealous
Knowing that he would tire, but do those
tire
That love the Sidhe?

EMER. What dancer of the Sidhe,
What creature of the reeling moon has
pursued him?

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. I have but to
touch your eyes and give them sight;
But stand at my left side.

[*He touches her eyes with his left hand, the right being withered.*

EMER. My husband there.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. But out of reach
—I have dissolved the dark
That hid him from your eyes, but not that other
That's hidden you from his.

EMER. Husband, husband!

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. Be silent, he is but a phantom now
And he can neither touch, nor hear, nor see;
The longing and the cries have drawn him hither.
He heard no sound, heard no articulate sound;
They could but banish rest, and make him dream,
And in that dream, as do all dreaming shades
Before they are accustomed to their freedom,
He has taken his familiar form; and yet
He crouches there not knowing where he is
Or at whose side he is crouched.

[*A* WOMAN OF THE SIDHE *has entered and stands a little inside the door.*

EMER. Who is this woman?

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. She has hurried from the Country-Under-Wave
And dreamed herself into that shape that he
May glitter in her basket; for the Sidhe
Are dextrous fishers and they fish for men

With dreams upon the hook.

EMER. And so that woman
Has hid herself in this disguise and made
Herself into a lie.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. A dream is body;
The dead move ever towards a dreamless
youth
And when they dream no more return no
more;
And those more holy shades that never
lived
But visit you in dreams.

EMER. I know her sort.
They find our men asleep, weary with war,
Or weary with the chase, and kiss their lips
And drop their hair upon them; from that
hour
Our men, who yet knew nothing of it all,
Are lonely, and when at fall of night we
press
Their hearts upon our hearts their hearts
are cold.

[*She draws a knife from her girdle.*

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. And so you think
to wound her with a knife.
She has an airy body. Look and listen;
I have not given you eyes and ears for
nothing.

[*The* WOMAN OF THE SIDHE *moves round the crouching* GHOST OF CUCHULAIN *at front of stage in a*

dance that grows gradually quicker, as he slowly awakes. At moments she may drop her hair upon his head but she does not kiss him. She is accompanied by string and flute and drum. Her mask and clothes must suggest gold or bronze or brass or silver, so that she seems more an idol than a human being. This suggestion may be repeated in her movements. Her hair, too, must keep the metallic suggestion.

GHOST OF CUCHULAIN. Who is it stands before me there
Shedding such light from limb and hair
As when the moon, complete at last
With every labouring crescent past,
And lonely with extreme delight,
Flings out upon the fifteenth night?

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. Because I long I am not complete.
What pulled your hands about your feet
And your head down upon your knees,
And hid your face?

GHOST OF CUCHULAIN. Old memories:
A dying boy, with handsome face
Upturned upon a beaten place;
A sacred yew-tree on a strand;
A woman that held in steady hand,
In all the happiness of her youth

Before her man had broken troth,
A burning wisp to light the door;
And many a round or crescent more;
Dead men and women. Memories
Have pulled my head upon my knees.
WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. Could you that have loved many a woman
That did not reach beyond the human,
Lacking a day to be complete,
Love one that though her heart can beat,
Lacks it but by an hour or so?
GHOST OF CUCHULAIN. I know you now, for long ago
I met you on the mountain-side,
Beside a well that seemed long dry,
Beside old thorns where the hawk flew.
I held out arms and hands; but you,
That now seem friendly, fled away
Half woman and half bird of prey.
WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. Hold out your arms and hands again;
You were not so dumbfounded when
I was that bird of prey, and yet
I am all woman now.
GHOST OF CUCHULAIN. I am not
The young and passionate man I was
And though that brilliant light surpass
All crescent forms, my memories
Weigh down my hands, abash my eyes.
WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. Then kiss my mouth. Though memory

Be beauty's bitterest enemy
I have no dread, for at my kiss
Memory on the moment vanishes:
Nothing but beauty can remain.

GHOST OF CUCHULAIN. And shall I never know again
Intricacies of blind remorse?

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. Time shall seem to stay his course;
When your mouth and my mouth meet
All my round shall be complete
Imagining all its circles run;
And there shall be oblivion
Even to quench Cuchulain's drouth,
Even to still that heart.

GHOST OF CUCHULAIN. Your mouth.

[*They are about to kiss, he turns away.*

O Emer, Emer.

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. So then it is she
Made you impure with memory.

GHOST OF CUCHULAIN. Still in that dream I see you stand,
A burning wisp in your right hand,
To wait my coming to the house,
As when our parents married us.

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. Being among the dead you love her
That valued every slut above her
While you still lived.

GHOST OF CUCHULAIN. O my lost Emer.

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. And there is not
a loose-tongued schemer
But could draw you, if not dead,
From her table and her bed.
But what could make you fit to wive
With flesh and blood, being born to live
Where no one speaks of broken troth,
For all have washed out of their eyes
Wind-blown dirt of their memories
To improve their sight?

GHOST OF CUCHULAIN. Your mouth, your
mouth.

[*Their lips approach, but* CUCHULAIN *turns away as* EMER *speaks.*

EMER. If but the dead will set him free
That I may speak with him at whiles
By the hearth-stone, I am content—
Content that he shall turn on me
Eyes that the cold moon, or the vague sea,
Or what I know not's made indifferent.

GHOST OF CUCHULAIN. What a wise
silence has fallen in this dark!
I know you now in all your ignorance
Of all whereby a lover's quiet is rent.
What dread so great as that he should
forget
The least chance sight or sound, or scratch
or mark
On an old door, or frail bird heard and seen
In the incredible clear light love cast
All round about her some forlorn lost day?

That face, though fine enough, is a fool's face
And there's a folly in the deathless Sidhe
Beyond man's reach.

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. I told you to forget
After my fashion; you would have none of it;
So now you may forget in a man's fashion.
There's an unbridled horse at the sea's edge;
Mount; it will carry you in an eye's wink
To where the King of Country-Under-Wave,
Old Mananan, nods above the board and moves
His chessmen in a dream. Demand your life
And come again on the unbridled horse.

GHOST OF CUCHULAIN. Forgive me those rough words. How could you know
That man is held to those whom he has loved
By pain they gave, or pain that he has given,
Intricacies of pain.

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. I am ashamed
That being of the deathless shades I chose
A man so knotted to impurity.

[*The* GHOST OF CUCHULAIN *goes out.*

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE [*to* FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN.] To you that have no living light, being dropped

From a last leprous crescent of the moon,
I owe it all.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. Because you have failed

I must forego your thanks, I that took pity
Upon your love and carried out your plan
To tangle all his life and make it nothing
That he might turn to you.

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. Was it from pity
You taught the woman to prevail against me?

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. You know my nature—by what name I am called.

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. Was it from pity that you hid the truth

That men are bound to women by the wrongs
They do or suffer?

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. You know what being I am.

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. I have been mocked and disobeyed—your power

Was more to you than my good-will, and now
I'll have you learn what my ill-will can do;
I lay you under bonds upon the instant
To stand before your King and face the charge
And take the punishment.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. I'll stand there first,
And tell my story first, and Mananan

Knows that his own harsh sea made my heart cold

WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. My horse is there and shall outrun your horse.

[*The* FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN *falls back, the* WOMAN OF THE SIDHE *goes out. Drum taps, music resembling horse hoofs.*

EITHNE INGUBA [*entering quickly*]. I heard the beat of hoofs, but saw no horse,

And then came other hoofs, and after that
I heard low angry cries and thereupon
I ceased to be afraid.

EMER. Cuchulain wakes.

[*The figure turns round. It once more wears the heroic mask.*

CUCHULAIN. Your arms, your arms. O Eithne Inguba,

I have been in some strange place and am afraid.

[*The* FIRST MUSICIAN *comes to the front of stage, the others from each side and unfold the cloth singing.*

[*Song for the unfolding and folding of the cloth.*]

THE MUSICIANS

Why does your heart beat thus?
Plain to be understood

I have met in a man's house
A statue of solitude,
Moving there and walking;
Its strange heart beating fast
For all our talking.
O still that heart at last.

O bitter reward
Of many a tragic tomb!
And we though astonished are dumb
And give but a sigh and a word,
A passing word.

Although the door be shut
And all seem well enough,
Although wide world hold not
A man but will give you his love
The moment he has looked at you,
He that has loved the best
May turn from a statue
His too human breast.

O bitter reward
Of many a tragic tomb!
And we though astonished are dumb
Or give but a sigh and a word,
A passing word.

What makes your heart so beat?
Is there no man at your side?
When beauty is complete

Your own thought will have died
And danger not be diminished;
Dimmed at three-quarter light
When moon's round is finished
The stars are out of sight.

O bitter reward
Of many a tragic tomb!
And we though astonished are dumb
Or give but a sigh and a word,
A passing word.

[*When the cloth is folded again the stage is bare.*

THE DREAMING OF THE BONES

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THREE MUSICIANS *(their faces made up to resemble masks).*

A YOUNG MAN.

A STRANGER *(wearing a mask).*

A YOUNG GIRL *(wearing a mask).*

Time—1916.

The stage is any bare place in a room close to the wall. A screen, with a pattern of mountain and sky, can stand against the wall, or a curtain with a like pattern hang upon it, but the pattern must only symbolise or suggest. One musician enters and then two others; the first stands singing, as in preceding plays, while the others take their places. Then all three sit down against the wall by their instruments, which are already there—a drum, a zither, and a flute. Or they unfold a cloth as in 'At the Hawk's Well,' while the instruments are carried in.

[*Song for the folding and unfolding of the cloth.*]

FIRST MUSICIAN
[*or all three musicians, singing*]

Why does my heart beat so?
Did not a shadow pass?
It passed by a moment ago.
Who can have trod in the grass?
What rogue is night-wandering?

Have not old writers said
That dizzy dreams can spring
From the dry bones of the dead?
And many a night it seems
That all the valley fills
With those fantastic dreams.
They overflow the hills,
So passionate is a shade,
Like wine that fills to the top
A grey-green cup of jade,
Or maybe an agate cup.

[*The three Musicians are now seated by the drum, flute, and zither at the back of the stage. The* FIRST MUSICIAN *speaks.*

The hour before dawn and the moon covered up;
The little village of Abbey is covered up;
The little narrow trodden way that runs
From the white road to the Abbey of Corcomroe
Is covered up; and all about the hills
Are like a circle of Agate or of Jade.
Somewhere among great rocks on the scarce grass
Birds cry, they cry their loneliness.
Even the sunlight can be lonely here,
Even hot noon is lonely. I hear a footfall—
A young man with a lantern comes this way.
He seems an Aran fisher, for he wears

The flannel bawneen and the cow-hide shoe.
He stumbles wearily, and stumbling prays.

[*A young man enters, praying in Irish.*

Once more the birds cry in their loneliness,
But now they wheel about our heads; and now
They have dropped on the grey stone to the northeast.

[*A man and a girl, in the costume of a past time, come in. They wear heroic masks.*

YOUNG MAN [*raising his lantern*]. Who is there? I cannot see what you are like.
Come to the light.

STRANGER. But what have you to fear?

YOUNG MAN. And why have you come creeping through the dark?

[*The girl blows out lantern.*

The wind has blown my lantern out. Where are you?
I saw a pair of heads against the sky
And lost them after; but you are in the right,
I should not be afraid in County Clare;
And should be, or should not be have no choice,
I have to put myself into your hands,
Now that my candle's out.

STRANGER. You have fought in Dublin?

YOUNG MAN. I was in the Post Office, and if taken
I shall be put against a wall and shot.
STRANGER. You know some place of refuge, have some plan
Or friend who will come to meet you?
YOUNG MAN. I am to lie
At daybreak on the mountain and keep watch
Until an Aran coracle puts in
At Muckanish or at the rocky shore
Under Finvarra, but would break my neck
If I went stumbling there alone in the dark.
STRANGER. We know the pathways that the sheep tread out,
And all the hiding-places of the hills,
And that they had better hiding-places once.
YOUNG MAN. You'd say they had better before English robbers
Cut down the trees or set them upon fire
For fear their owners might find shelter there.
What is that sound?
STRANGER. An old horse gone astray.
He has been wandering on the road all night.
YOUNG MAN. I took him for a man and horse. Police
Are out upon the roads. In the late Rising
I think there was no man of us but hated
To fire at soldiers who but did their duty
And were not of our race, but when a man

Is born in Ireland and of Irish stock,
When he takes part against us—
STRANGER. I will put you safe,
No living man shall set his eyes upon you;
I will not answer for the dead.
YOUNG MAN. The dead?
STRANGER. For certain days the stones where you must lie
Have in the hour before the break of day
Been haunted.
YOUNG MAN. But I was not born at midnight.
STRANGER. Many a man that was born in the full daylight
Can see them plain, will pass them on the high-road
Or in the crowded market-place of the town,
And never know that they have passed.
YOUNG MAN. My Grandam
Would have it they did penance everywhere;
Some lived through their old lives again.
STRANGER. In a dream;
And some for an old scruple must hang spitted
Upon the swaying tops of lofty trees;
Some are consumed in fire, some withered up
By hail and sleet out of the wintry North,
And some but live through their old lives again.

YOUNG MAN. Well, let them dream into
what shape they please
And fill waste mountains with the invisible
tumult
Of the fantastic conscience. I have no
dread;
They cannot put me into jail or shoot
me,
And seeing that their blood has returned
to fields,
That have grown red from drinking blood
like mine,
They would not if they could betray.
STRANGER. This pathway
Runs to the ruined Abbey of Corcomroe;
The Abbey passed, we are soon among the
stone
And shall be at the ridge before the cocks
Of Aughanish or Bailevelehan
Or grey Aughtmana shake their wings and
cry. [*They go round the stage once.*
FIRST MUSICIAN [*speaking*]. They've
passed the shallow well and the flat
stone
Fouled by the drinking cattle, the narrow
lane
Where mourners for five centuries have
carried
Noble or peasant to his burial;
An owl is crying out above their heads.

[*Singing.*]

Why should the heart take fright?
What sets it beating so?
The bitter sweetness of the night
Has made it but a lonely thing.
Red bird of March, begin to crow,
Up with the neck and clap the wing,
Red cock, and crow.

[*They go round the stage once. The* FIRST MUSICIAN *speaks.*

And now they have climbed through the long grassy field
And passed the ragged thorn trees and the gap
In the ancient hedge; and the tomb-nested owl
At the foot's level beats with a vague wing.

[*Singing.*]

My head is in a cloud;
I'd let the whole world go;
My rascal heart is proud
Remembering and remembering.
Red bird of March, begin to crow,
Up with the neck and clap the wing,
Red cock, and crow.

[*They go round the stage once. The* FIRST MUSICIAN *speaks.*

They are among the stones above the ash
Above the briar and thorn and the scarce grass;

Hidden amid the shadow far below them
The cat-headed bird is crying out.

[*Singing.*]

The dreaming bones cry out
Because the night winds blow
And heaven's a cloudy blot.
Calamity can have its fling.
Red bird of March, begin to crow,
Up with the neck and clap the wing,
Red cock, and crow.

STRANGER. We're almost at the summit and can rest.
The road is a faint shadow there; and there
The Abbey lies amid its broken tombs.
In the old days we should have heard a bell
Calling the monks before day broke to pray;
And when the day has broken on the ridge,
The crowing of its cocks.

YOUNG MAN. Is there no house
Famous for sanctity or architectural beauty
In Clare or Kerry, or in all wide Connacht,
The enemy has not unroofed?

STRANGER. Close to the altar
Broken by wind and frost and worn by time
Donogh O'Brien has a tomb, a name in Latin.
He wore fine clothes and knew the secrets of women,

But he rebelled against the King of Thomond
And died in his youth.

YOUNG MAN. And why should he rebel?
The King of Thomond was his rightful master.
It was men like Donogh who made Ireland weak—
My curse on all that troop, and when I die
I'll leave my body, if I have any choice,
Far from his ivy tod and his owl; have those
Who, if your tale is true, work out a penance
Upon the mountain-top where I am to hide,
Come from the Abbey graveyard?

YOUNG GIRL. They have not that luck,
But are more lonely; those that are buried there,
Warred in the heat of the blood; if they were rebels
Some momentary impulse made them rebels,
Or the commandment of some petty king
Who hated Thomond. Being but common sinners,
No callers in of the alien from oversea,
They and their enemies of Thomond's party
Mix in a brief dream battle above their bones;
Or make one drove; or drift in amity;
Or in the hurry of the heavenly round
Forget their earthly names. These are alone
Being accursed.

YOUNG MAN. But if what seems is true

And there are more upon the other side
Than on this side of death, many a ghost
Must meet them face to face and pass the word
Even upon this grey and desolate hill.

YOUNG GIRL. Until this hour no ghost or living man
Has spoken though seven centuries have run
Since they, weary of life and of men's eyes,
Flung down their bones in some forgotten place
Being accursed.

YOUNG MAN. I have heard that there are souls
Who, having sinned after a monstrous fashion,
Take on them, being dead, a monstrous image
To drive the living, should they meet its face,
Crazy, and be a terror to the dead.

YOUNG GIRL. But these
Were comely even in their middle life
And carry, now that they are dead, the image
Of their first youth, for it was in that youth
Their sin began.

YOUNG MAN. I have heard of angry ghosts
Who wander in a wilful solitude.

YOUNG GIRL. These have no thought but love; nor joy
But that upon the instant when their penance

Draws to its height and when two hearts
are wrung
Nearest to breaking, if hearts of shadows
break,
His eyes can mix with hers; nor any pang
That is so bitter as that double glance,
Being accursed.

YOUNG MAN. But what is this strange
penance—
That when their eyes have met can wring
them most?

YOUNG GIRL. Though eyes can meet,
their lips can never meet.

YOUNG MAN. And yet it seems they
wander side by side.
But doubtless you would say that when lips
meet
And have not living nerves, it is no meeting.

YOUNG GIRL. Although they have no
blood, or living nerves,
Who once lay warm and live the live-long
night
In one another's arms, and knew their part
In life, being now but of the people of
dreams,
Is a dream's part; although they are but
shadows,
Hovering between a thorn tree and a stone,
Who have heaped up night on winged night;
although
No shade however harried and consumed

Would change his own calamity for theirs,
Their manner of life were blessed could their lips
A moment meet; but when he has bent his head
Close to her head, or hand would slip in hand,
The memory of their crime flows up between
And drives them apart.

YOUNG MAN. The memory of a crime—
He took her from a husband's house it may be,
But does the penance for a passionate sin
Last for so many centuries?

YOUNG GIRL. No, no;
The man she chose, the man she was chosen by
Cared little and cares little from whose house
They fled towards dawn amid the flights of arrows,
Or that it was a husband's and a king's;
And how, if that were all, could she lack friends,
On crowded roads or on the unpeopled hill?
Helen herself had opened wide the door
Where night by night she dreams herself awake
And gathers to her breast a dreaming man.

YOUNG MAN. What crime can stay so in the memory?

What crime can keep apart the lips of lovers
Wandering and alone?
YOUNG GIRL. Her king and lover
Was overthrown in battle by her husband,
And for her sake and for his own, being blind
And bitter and bitterly in love, he brought
A foreign army from across the sea.
YOUNG MAN. You speak of Dermot and of Dervorgilla
Who brought the Norman in?
YOUNG GIRL. Yes, yes, I spoke
Of that most miserable, most accursed pair
Who sold their country into slavery, and yet
They were not wholly miserable and accursed
If somebody of their race at last would say:
'I have forgiven them.'
YOUNG MAN. Oh, never, never
Shall Dermot and Dervorgilla be forgiven.
YOUNG GIRL. If some one of their race forgave at last
Lip would be pressed on lip.
YOUNG MAN. Oh, never, never
Shall Dermot and Dervorgilla be forgiven.
You have told your story well, so well indeed
I could not help but fall into the mood
And for a while believe that it was true
Or half believe; but better push on now.
The horizon to the East is growing bright.

[*They go round stage once. The musicians play.*

So here we're on the summit. I can see
The Aran Islands, Connemara Hills,
And Galway in the breaking light; there too
The enemy has toppled roof and gable;
And torn the panelling from ancient rooms;
What generations of old men had known
Like their own hands, and children wondered at,
Has boiled a trooper's porridge. That town had lain,
But for the pair that you would have me pardon,
Amid its gables and its battlements
Like any old admired Italian town;
For though we have neither coal, nor iron ore,
To make us wealthy and corrupt the air,
Our country, if that crime were uncommitted,
Had been most beautiful. Why do you dance?
Why do you gaze, and with so passionate eyes,
One on the other; and then turn away,
Covering your eyes, and weave it in a dance?
Who are you? what are you? you are not natural.

YOUNG GIRL. Seven hundred years our lips have never met.

YOUNG MAN. Why do you look so strangely at one another,

So strangely and so sweetly?

YOUNG GIRL. Seven hundred years.

YOUNG MAN. So strangely and so sweetly.
All the ruin,
All, all their handiwork is blown away
As though the mountain air had blown it away
Because their eyes have met. They cannot hear,
Being folded up and hidden in their dance.
The dance is changing now. They have dropped their eyes,
They have covered up their eyes as though their hearts
Had suddenly been broken—never, never
Shall Dermot and Dervorgilla be forgiven.
They have drifted in the dance from rock to rock.
They have raised their hands as though to snatch the sleep
That lingers always in the abyss of the sky
Though they can never reach it. A cloud floats up
And covers all the mountain head in a moment;
And now it lifts and they are swept away.

[*The* STRANGER *and the* YOUNG GIRL *go out.*

I had almost yielded and forgiven it all—
This is indeed a place of terrible temptation.

[*The Musicians begin unfolding and folding a black cloth. The* FIRST MUSICIAN *comes forward to the front of the stage, at the centre. He holds the cloth before him. The other two come one on either side and unfold it. They afterwards fold it up in the same way. While it is unfolded, the* YOUNG MAN *leaves the stage.*

[*Songs for the unfolding and folding of the cloth*]

THE MUSICIANS [*singing*]

I

At the grey round of the hill
Music of a lost kingdom
Runs, runs and is suddenly still.
The winds out of Clare-Galway
Carry it: suddenly it is still.

I have heard in the night air
A wandering airy music;
And moidered in that snare
A man is lost of a sudden,
In that sweet wandering snare.

What finger first began
Music of a lost kingdom?
They dream that laughed in the sun.
Dry bones that dream are bitter,
They dream and darken our sun.

Those crazy fingers play
A wandering airy music;
Our luck is withered away,
And wheat in the wheat-ear withered,
And the wind blows it away.

II

My heart ran wild when it heard
The curlew cry before dawn
And the eddying cat-headed bird;
But now the night is gone.
I have heard from far below
The strong March birds a-crow,
Stretch neck and clap the wing,
Red cocks, and crow.

CALVARY

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THREE MUSICIANS *(their faces made up to resemble masks).*

CHRIST *(wearing a mask).*

LAZARUS *(wearing a mask).*

JUDAS *(wearing a mask).*

THREE ROMAN SOLDIERS *(their faces masked or made up to resemble masks).*

At the beginning of the play the FIRST MUSICIAN *comes to the front of the bare place, round three sides of which the audience are seated, with a folded cloth hanging from his joined hands. Two other musicians come, as in the preceding plays, one from either side, and unfold the cloth so that it shuts out the stage, and then fold it again, singing and moving rhythmically. They do the same at the end of the play, which enables the players to leave the stage unseen.*

[*Song for the folding and the unfolding of the cloth*]

FIRST MUSICIAN

Motionless under the moon-beam,
Up to his feathers in the stream;
Although fish leap, the white heron
Shivers in a dumbfounded dream.

SECOND MUSICIAN

God has not died for the white heron.

THIRD MUSICIAN

Although half famished he'll not dare
Dip or do anything but stare

Upon the glittering image of a heron,
That now is lost and now is there.

SECOND MUSICIAN

God has not died for the white heron.

FIRST MUSICIAN

But that the full is shortly gone
And after that is crescent moon,
It's certain that the moon-crazed heron
Would be but fishes' diet soon.

SECOND MUSICIAN

God has not died for the white heron.

[*The three musicians are now seated by the drum, flute, and zither at the back of stage.*

FIRST MUSICIAN. The road to Calvary, and I beside it
Upon an ancient stone. Good Friday's come,
The day whereon Christ dreams His passion through.
He climbs up hither but as a dreamer climbs.
The cross that but exists because He dreams it
Shortens His breath and wears away His strength.
And now He stands amid a mocking crowd,
Heavily breathing.

[*A player with the mask of Christ and carrying a cross has entered and now stands leaning upon the cross.*

Those that are behind
Climb on the shoulders of the men in front
To shout their mockery: 'Work a miracle,'
Cries one, and 'Save yourself'; another cries,
'Call on your father now before your bones
Have been picked bare by the great desert birds';
Another cries, 'Call out with a loud voice
And tell him that his son is cast away
Amid the mockery of his enemies.'

[*Singing*]

Oh, but the mockers' cry
Makes my heart afraid,
As though a flute of bone
Taken from a heron's thigh,
A heron crazed by the moon,
Were cleverly, softly played.

[*Speaking*]

Who is this from whom the crowd has shrunk,
As though he had some look that terrified?
He has a deathly face, and yet he moves
Like a young foal that sees the hunt go by
And races in the field.

[*A player with the mask of Lazarus has entered.*

LAZARUS. He raised me up.
I am the man that died and was raised up;
I am called Lazarus.
CHRIST. Seeing that you died,
Lay in the tomb four days and were raised up,
You will not mock at me.
LAZARUS. For four whole days
I had been dead and I was lying still
In an old comfortable mountain cavern
When you came climbing there with a great crowd
And dragged me to the light.
CHRIST. I called your name.
'Lazarus, come out,' I said, and you came out
Bound up in cloths, your face bound in a cloth.
LAZARUS. You took my death, give me your death instead.
CHRIST. I gave you life.
LAZARUS. But death is what I ask.
Alive I never could escape your love,
And when I sickened towards my death I thought
I'll to the desert, or chuckle in a corner
Mere ghost, a solitary thing. I died
And saw no more until I saw you stand
In the opening of the tomb; 'Come out!' you called;
You dragged me to the light as boys drag out

A rabbit when they have dug its hole away;
And now with all the shouting at your heels
You travel towards the death I am denied.
And that is why I have hurried to this road;
And that is why I claim your death.

CHRIST. I have conquered death
And all the dead shall be raised up again.

LAZARUS. Then what I heard is true. I thought to die
When my allotted years ran out again;
And that, being gone, you could not hinder it;
But now you will blind with light the solitude
That death has made; you will disturb that corner
Where I had thought I might lie safe for ever.

CHRIST. I do my Father's will.

LAZARUS. And not your own;
And I was free four days, four days being dead.
Climb up to Calvary, but turn your eyes
From Lazarus that cannot find a tomb
Although he search all height and depth: make way,
Make way for Lazarus that must go search
Among the desert places where there is nothing
But howling wind and solitary birds.

[*He goes out.*

FIRST MUSICIAN. The crowd shrinks backward from the face that seems
Death stricken and death hungry still; and now
Martha, and those three Marys, and the rest
That live but in His love are gathered round Him.
He holds His right arm out, and on His arm
Their lips are pressed and their tears fall; and now
They cast them on the ground before His dirty
Blood-dabbled feet and clean them with their hair.

[*Sings*]

Take but His love away
Their love becomes a feather
Of eagle, swan or gull,
Or a drowned heron's feather
Tossed hither and thither
Upon the bitter spray
And the moon at the full.

CHRIST. I felt their hair upon my feet a moment
And then they fled away—why have they fled?
Why has the street grown empty of a sudden
As though all fled from it in terror?

JUDAS [*who has just entered*]. I am Judas

That sold you for the thirty pieces of silver.
CHRIST. You were beside me every day, and saw
The dead raised up and blind men given their sight,
And all that I have said and taught you have known,
Yet doubt that I am God.
JUDAS. I have not doubted;
I knew it from the first moment that I saw you;
I had no need of miracles to prove it.
CHRIST. And yet you have betrayed me.
JUDAS. I have betrayed you
Because you seemed all-powerful.
CHRIST. My Father
Even now, if I were but to whisper it,
Would break the world in His miraculous fury
To set me free.
JUDAS. And is there not one man
In the wide world that is not in your power?
CHRIST. My Father put all men into my hands.
JUDAS. That was the very thought that drove me wild,
I could not bear to think you had but to whistle
And I must do; but after that I thought
Whatever man betrays Him will be free;
And life grew bearable again. And now

Is there a secret left I do not know,
Knowing that if a man betrays a God
He is the stronger of the two.
CHRIST. But if
'Twere the commandment of that God Himself
That God were still the stronger?
JUDAS. When I planned it
There was no live thing near me but a heron
So full of itself that it seemed terrified.
CHRIST. But my betrayal was decreed that hour
When the foundations of the world were laid.
JUDAS. It was decreed that somebody betray you—
I'd thought of that—but not that I should do it,
I the man Judas, born on such a day,
In such a village, such and such his parents;
Nor that I'd go with my old coat upon me
To the High Priest, and chuckle to myself
As people chuckle when alone, and that I'd do it
For thirty pieces and no more, no less,
And neither with a nod, a look, nor a sent message,
But with a kiss upon your cheek. I did it,
I, Judas, and no other man, and now
You cannot even save me.
CHRIST. Begone from me.

Three Roman soldiers have entered.

FIRST ROMAN SOLDIER. He has been chosen to hold up the cross.

[*During what follows,* JUDAS *holds up the cross while* CHRIST *stands with His arms stretched out upon it.*

SECOND ROMAN SOLDIER. We'll keep the rest away; they are too persistent;
They are always wanting something.

THIRD ROMAN SOLDIER. Die in peace.
There's no one here but Judas and ourselves.

CHRIST. And who are you that ask your God for nothing?

THIRD ROMAN SOLDIER. We are the gamblers, and when you are dead
We'll settle who is to have that cloak of yours
By throwing dice.

SECOND ROMAN SOLDIER. Our dice were carved
Out of an old sheep's thigh at Ephesus.

FIRST ROMAN SOLDIER. Although but one of us can win the cloak
That will not make us quarrel; what does it matter?
One day one loses and the next day wins.

SECOND ROMAN SOLDIER. Whatever happens is the best we say
So that it's unexpected.

THIRD ROMAN SOLDIER. Had you sent
A crier through the world you had not found
More comfortable companions for a death-bed
Than three old gamblers that have asked for nothing.
FIRST ROMAN SOLDIER. They say you're good and that you made the world,
But it's no matter.
SECOND ROMAN SOLDIER. Come; now let us dance
The dance of the dice-throwers, for it may be
He cannot live much longer and has not seen it.
THIRD ROMAN SOLDIER. If he were but the God of dice he'd know it,
But he is not that God.
FIRST ROMAN SOLDIER. One thing is plain,
To know that he has nothing that we need
Must be a comfort to him.
SECOND ROMAN SOLDIER. In the dance
We quarrel for a while, but settle it
By throwing dice, and after that, being friends,
Join hand to hand and wheel about the cross. [*They dance.*
CHRIST. My Father, why hast Thou forsaken Me.

[*Song of the folding and unfolding of the cloth*]

FIRST MUSICIAN

Lonely the sea-bird lies at her rest
Blown like a dawn-blenched parcel of spray
Upon the wind, or follows her prey
Under a great wave's hollowing crest.

SECOND MUSICIAN

God has not appeared to the birds.

THIRD MUSICIAN

The geer-eagle has chosen his part
In blue deep of the upper air
Where one-eyed day can meet his stare;
He is content with his savage heart.

SECOND MUSICIAN

God has not appeared to the birds.

FIRST MUSICIAN

But where have last year's cygnets gone?
The lake is empty; why do they fling
White wing out beside white wing?
What can a swan need but a swan?

SECOND MUSICIAN

God has not appeared to the birds.

NOTES AND MUSIC

NOTE ON THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF 'AT THE HAWK'S WELL'

A COUPLE of years ago I was sitting in my stall at the Court Theatre in London watching one of my own plays, *The King's Threshold*. In front of me were three people, seemingly a husband, a wife, and a woman friend. The husband was bored; he yawned and stretched himself and shifted in his seat, and I watched him with distress. I was inclined to be angry, but reminded myself that music, where there are no satisfying audible words, bores me as much, for I have no ear or only a primitive ear. Presently when the little princesses came upon the stage in their red clothes, the woman friend, who had seemed also a little bored, said: 'They do things very well, and became attentive. The distinguished painter who had designed the clothes at any rate could interest her. The wife, who had sat motionless from the first, said when the curtain had fallen and the applause—was it politeness or enthusiasm?—had come to an end, 'I would not have missed it for the world.' She was perhaps a reader of my poetry who had persuaded the others to come, and she had found a pleasure, the book could not give her, in the combination of words and speech. Yet when I think of my play, I do not call her to the mind's eye, or even her friend who found the long red gloves of the little princesses amusing, but always that bored man; the worst of it is that I could not pay my players, or the seamstress, or the owner of the stage, unless I could draw to my plays those who prefer light amuse-

ment or have no ear for verse, and fortunately they are all very polite.

Being sensitive, or not knowing how to escape the chance of sitting behind the wrong people, I have begun to shrink from sending my muses where they are but half-welcomed; and even in Dublin, where the pit has an ear for verse, I have no longer the appetite to carry me through the daily rehearsals. Yet I need a theatre; I believe myself to be a dramatist; I desire to show events and not merely tell of them; and two of my best friends were won for me by my plays, and I seem to myself most alive at the moment when a room full of people share the one lofty emotion. My blunder has been that I did not discover in my youth that my theatre must be the ancient theatre that can be made by unrolling a carpet or marking out a place with a stick, or setting a screen against the wall. Certainly those who care for my kind of poetry must be numerous enough, if I can bring them together, to pay half-a-dozen players who can bring all their properties in a cab and perform in their leisure moments.

I have found my first model—and in literature if we would not be parvenus we must have a model—in the 'Noh' stage of aristocratic Japan. I have described in *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* what has seemed to me important on that most subtle stage. I do not think of my discovery as mere economy, for it has been a great gain to get rid of scenery, to substitute for a crude landscape painted upon canvas three performers who, sitting before the wall or a patterned screen, describe landscape or event, and accompany movement with drum and gong, or deepen the emotion of the words with zither or flute. Painted scenery after all is unnecessary to my friends and to myself, for our imagination kept living by the arts can imagine a mountain covered with thorn-trees in a

drawing-room without any great trouble, and we have many quarrels with even good scene-painting.

Then too the masks forced upon us by the absence of any special lighting, or by the nearness of the audience, who surround the players upon three sides, do not seem to us eccentric. We are accustomed to faces of bronze and of marble, and what could be more suitable than that Cuchulain, let us say, a half-supernatural legendary person, should show to us a face, not made before the looking-glass by some leading player—there too we have many quarrels—but moulded by some distinguished artist? We are a learned people, and we remember how the Roman theatre, when it became more intellectual, abandoned 'make-up' and used the mask instead, and that the most famous artists of Japan modelled masks that are still in use after hundreds of years. It would be a stirring adventure for a poet and an artist, working together, to create once more heroic or grotesque types that, keeping always an appropriate distance from life, would seem images of those profound emotions that exist only in solitude and in silence. Nor has any one told me after a performance that he has missed a changing facial expression, for the mask seems to change with the light that falls upon it, and besides, in poetical and tragic art, as every 'producer' knows, expression is mainly in those movements that are of the entire body.

At the Hawk's Well was performed for the first time in April, 1916, in a friend's drawing-room, and only those who cared for poetry were invited. It was played upon the floor, and the players came in by the same door as the audience, and the audience and the players and I myself were pleased. A few days later it was revived in Lady Islington's big drawing-room at Chesterfield Gardens for the benefit of a war charity. And round the platform upon three

sides were three hundred fashionable people, and once more my muses were but half welcome. I remember, however, with a little pleasure that we found a newspaper photographer planting his camera in a dressing-room, and explained to him that as fifty people could pay our expenses, we did not invite the press, and that flashlight photographs were not desirable for their own sake. He was incredulous and persistent—a whole page somewhere or other was at our disposal—and it was nearly ten minutes before we could persuade him to go away. What a relief after directing a theatre for so many years—for I am one of the two directors of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin—to think no more of pictures unless Mr. Dulac or some other distinguished man has made them, nor of all those paragraphs written by young men, perhaps themselves intelligent, who must applaud the common taste or starve!

Perhaps I shall turn to something else now that our Japanese dancer, Mr. Itow, whose minute intensity of movement in the dance of the hawk so well suited our small room and private art, has been hired by a New York theatre, or perhaps I shall find another dancer. I am certain, however, that whether I grow tired or not—and one does grow tired of always quarrying the stone for one's statue—I have found out the only way the subtler forms of literature can find dramatic expression. Shakespeare's art was public, now resounding and declamatory, now lyrical and subtle, but always public, because poetry was a part of the general life of a people who had been trained by the Church to listen to difficult words, and who sang, instead of the songs of the music-halls, many songs that are still beautiful. A man who had sung 'Barbara Allan' in his own house would not, as I have heard the gallery of the Lyceum Theatre, receive the love speeches of Juliet with an ironical chirrup-

ing. We must recognise the change as the painters did when, finding no longer palaces and churches to decorate, they made framed pictures to hang upon a wall. Whatever we lose in mass and in power we should recover in elegance and in subtlety. Our lyrical and our narrative poetry alike have used their freedom and have approached nearer, as Pater said all the arts would if they were able, to 'the condition of music'; and if our modern poetical drama has failed, it is mainly because, always dominated by the example of Shakespeare, it would restore an irrevocable past.

W. B. Y., 1916.

MUSIC FOR 'AT THE HAWK'S WELL' [1]

By EDMUND DULAC

A Note on the Instruments

In order to apply to the music the idea of great simplicity of execution underlying the whole spirit of the performance, it was necessary to use instruments that any one with a fair idea of music could learn in a few days.

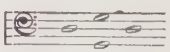
The following offer hardly any difficulty, while they provide a sufficient background of simple sounds which the performer can, after a very little amount of practice, elaborate at will.

A plain bamboo flute giving the appropriate scale.

A harp, a drum and a gong. For these last two, any instruments on oriental lines with a good shape and a deep mellow sound.

For the harp an ordinary zither, such as shown in the design of the musician, can be used. The strings, beginning by the lower ones, are grouped in nine or ten chords of four notes consisting of: the key-note, two strings in unison giving the fifth above, and the octave of the key-note.

Ex.:



Beyond these chords there are seven double strings tuned to any pentatonic scale that suits the play.

The tuning of the chords and free strings would

[1] All rights of performance reserved by Edmund Dulac.

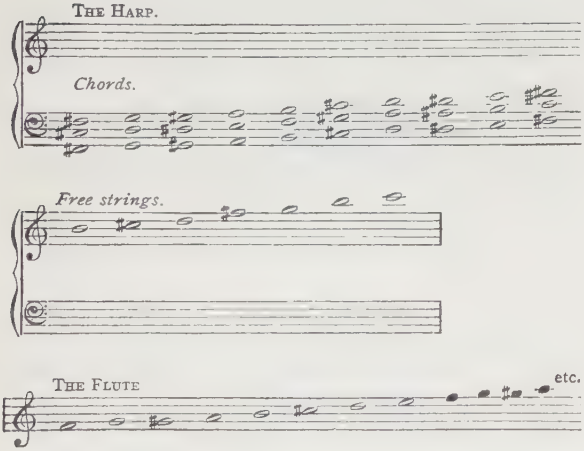
be altered according to the performance, and several flutes giving different scales would be required.

The same chords and scales should be used throughout any one play.

The instruments are distributed as follows: one musician plays the drum and gong, one the flute, the singer takes the harp.

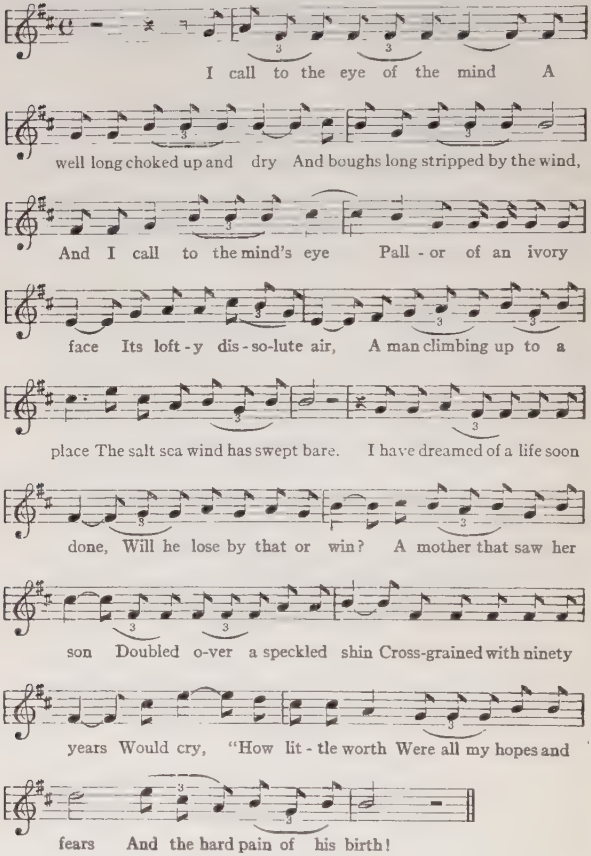
The drum and the gong must be used at times during the performance to emphasise the spoken word; no definite notation of this can be given, and it is left to the imagination and taste of the musician.

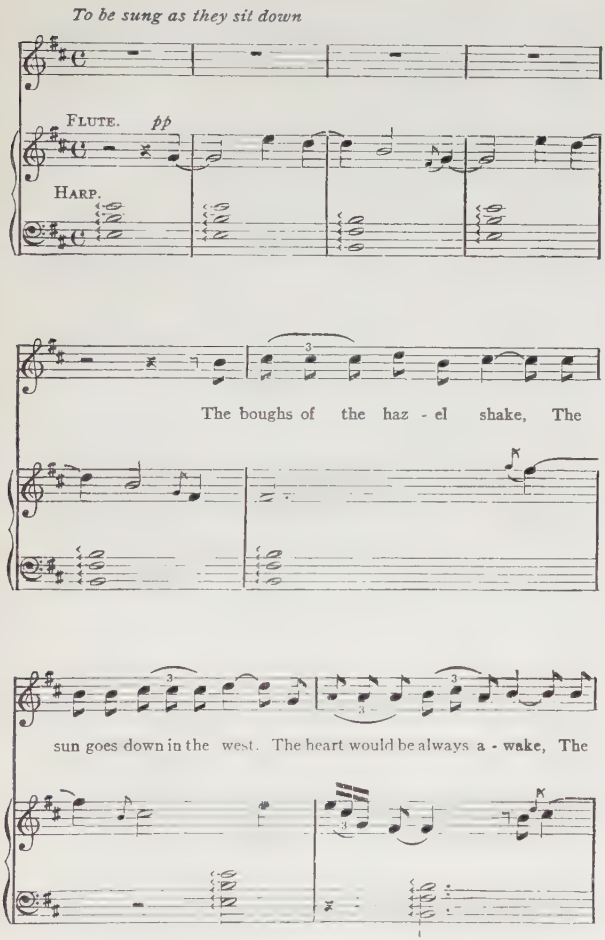
SCALES FOR THE INSTRUMENTS

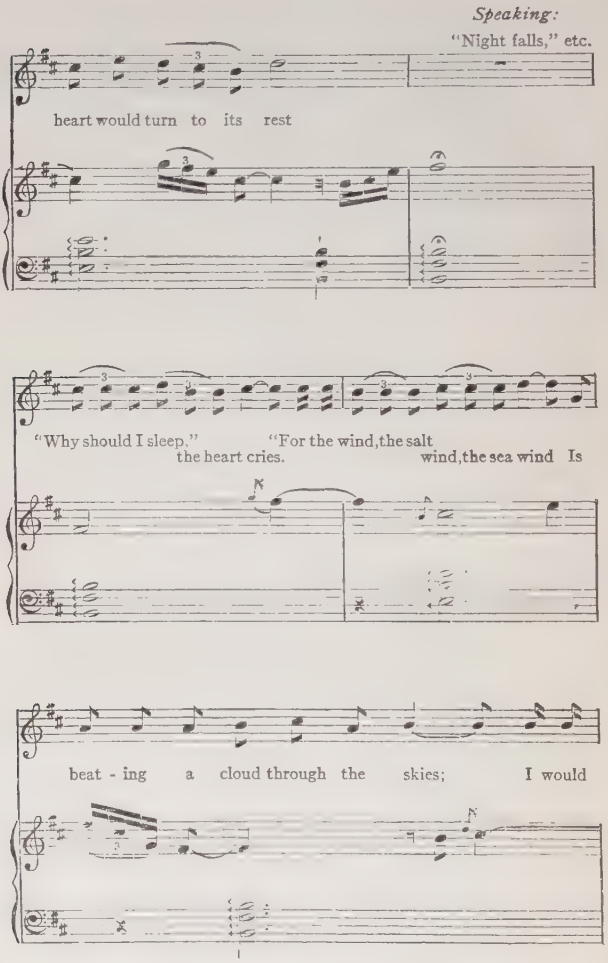


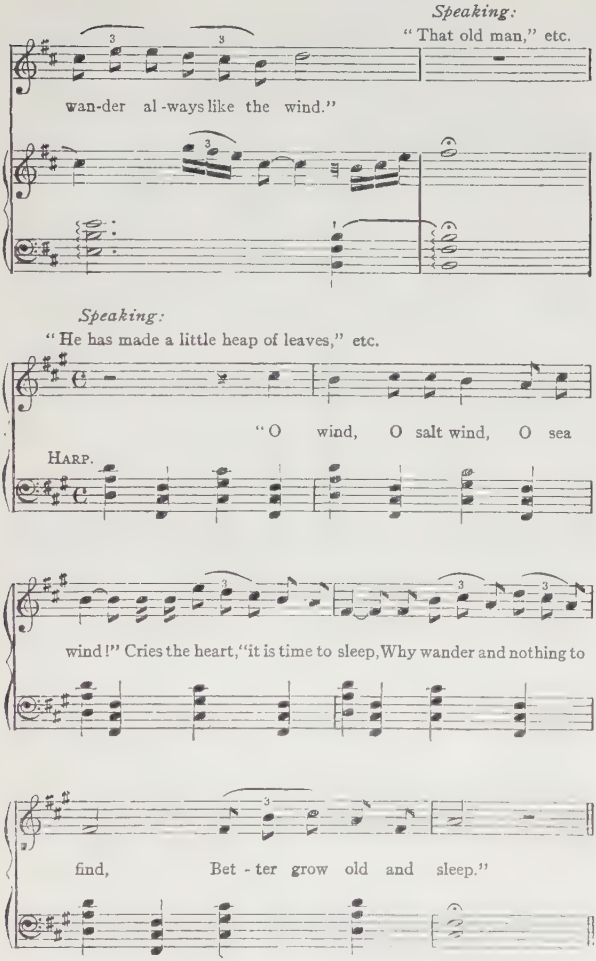
MUSIC FOR "AT THE HAWK'S WELL"

To be sung without accompaniment as they unfold the curtain.


I call to the eye of the mind A
well long choked up and dry And boughs long stripped by the wind,
And I call to the mind's eye Pall - or of an ivory
face Its loft - y dis - so-lute air, A man climbing up to a
place The salt sea wind has swept bare. I have dreamed of a life soon
done, Will he lose by that or win? A mother that saw her
son Doubled o-ver a speckled shin Cross-grained with ninety
years Would cry, "How lit - tle worth Were all my hopes and
fears And the hard pain of his birth!

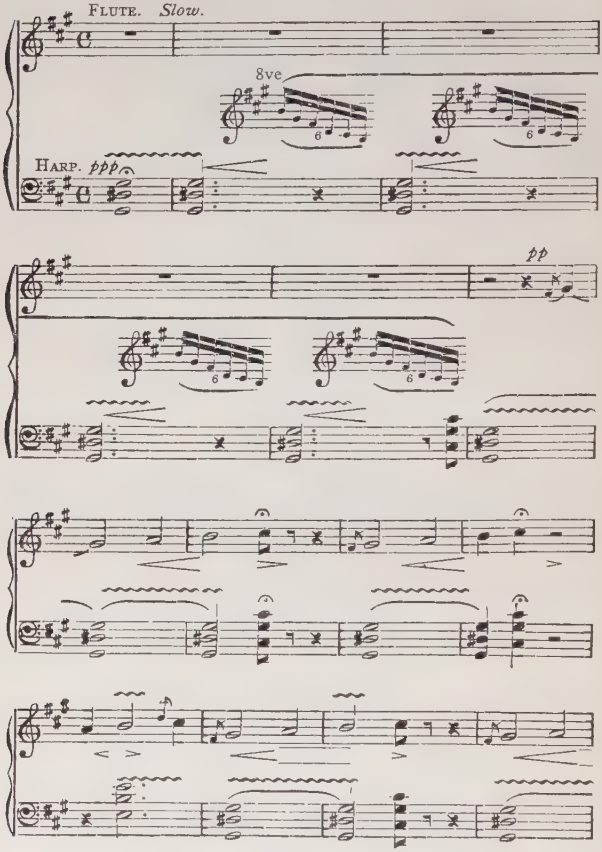
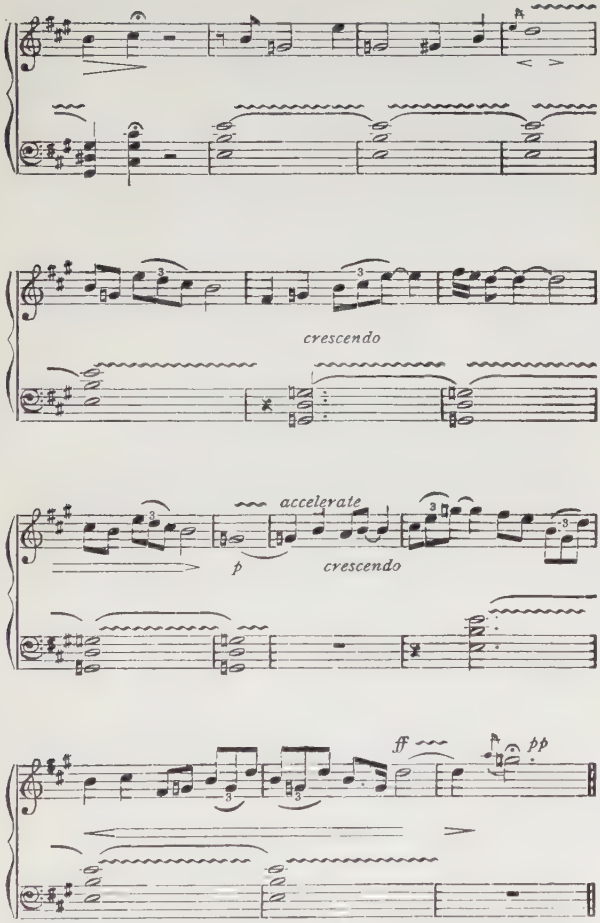

To be sung as they sit down
FLUTE. pp
HARP.
The boughs of the haz - el shake, The
sun goes down in the west. The heart would be always a - wake, The


Speaking:
"Night falls," etc.
heart would turn to its rest
"Why should I sleep," the heart cries.
"For the wind, the salt wind, the sea wind Is
beat - ing a cloud through the skies; I would


Speaking:
"That old man," etc.
wan-der al-ways like the wind."
Speaking:
"He has made a little heap of leaves," etc.
"O wind, O salt wind, O sea
Harp.
wind!" Cries the heart, "it is time to sleep, Why wander and nothing to
find, Bet-ter grow old and sleep."

PRELUDE TO THE DANCE

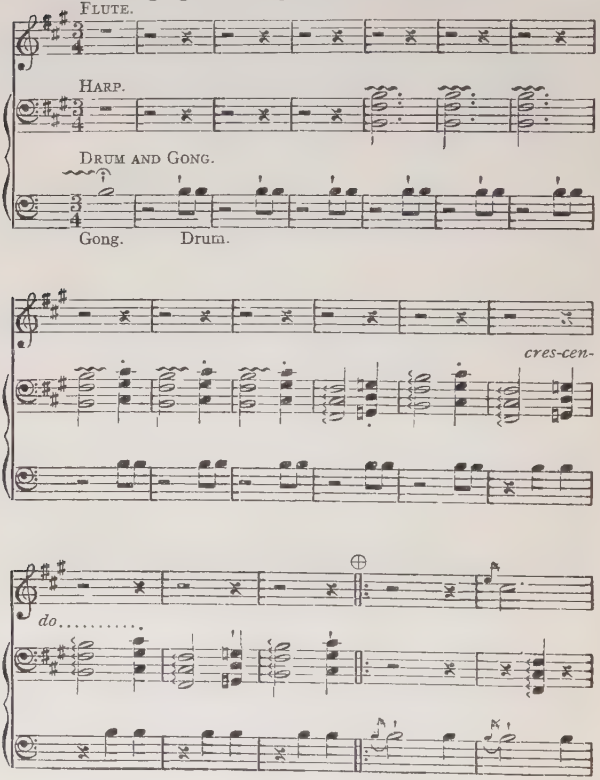
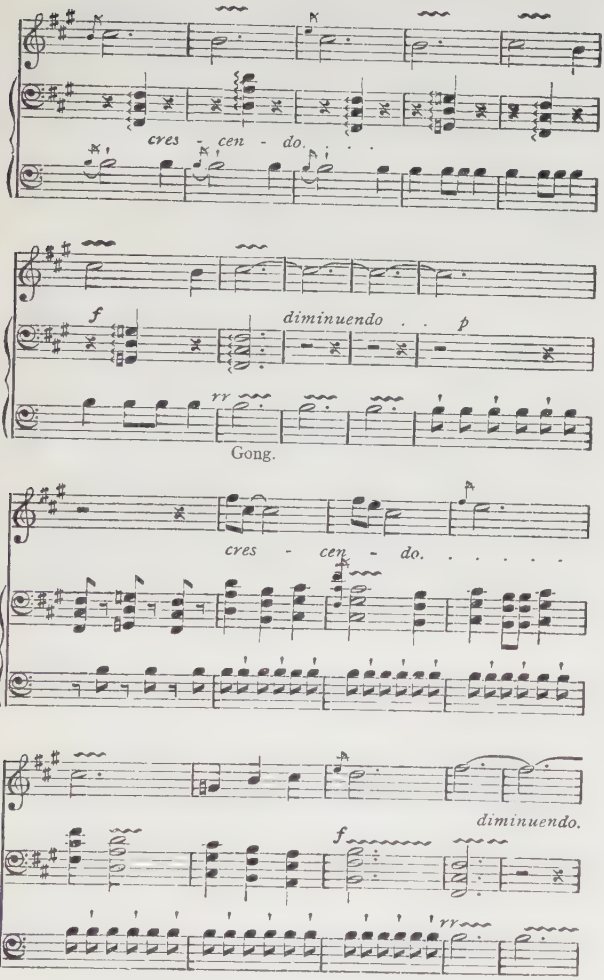
To begin when the Young Man says:
"Ah, you have looked at her . . ."

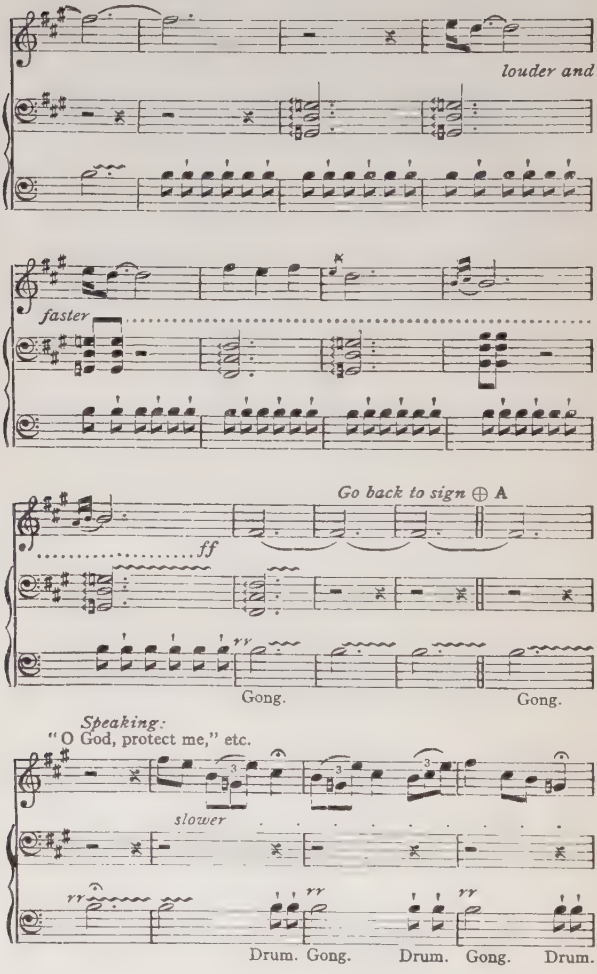


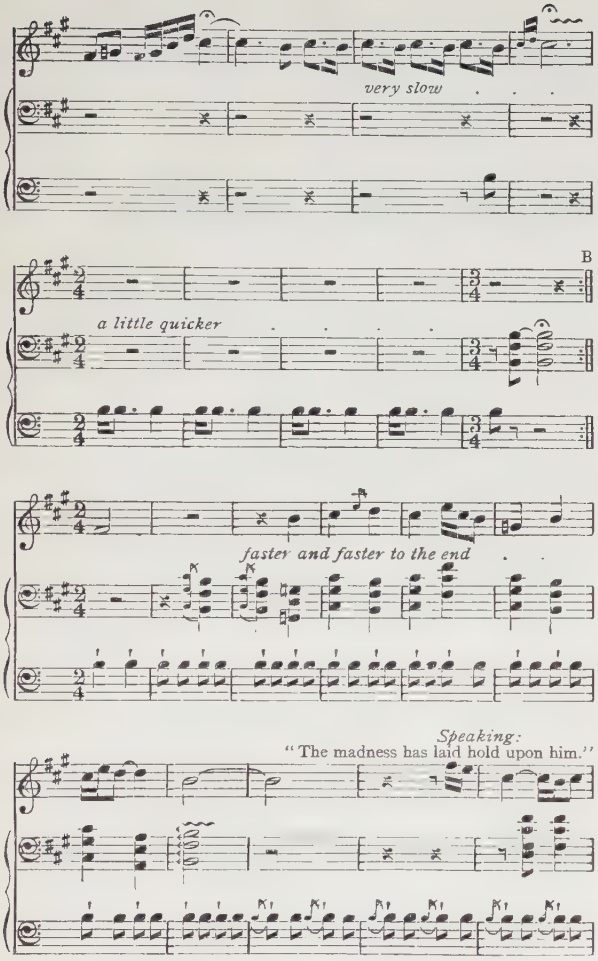
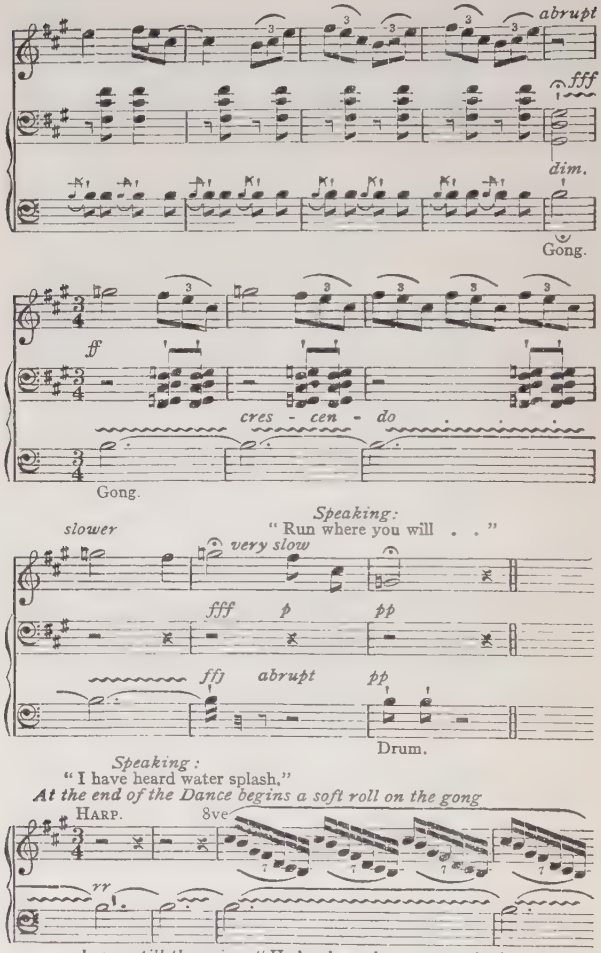
crescendo
accelerate
p
crescendo
ff
pp

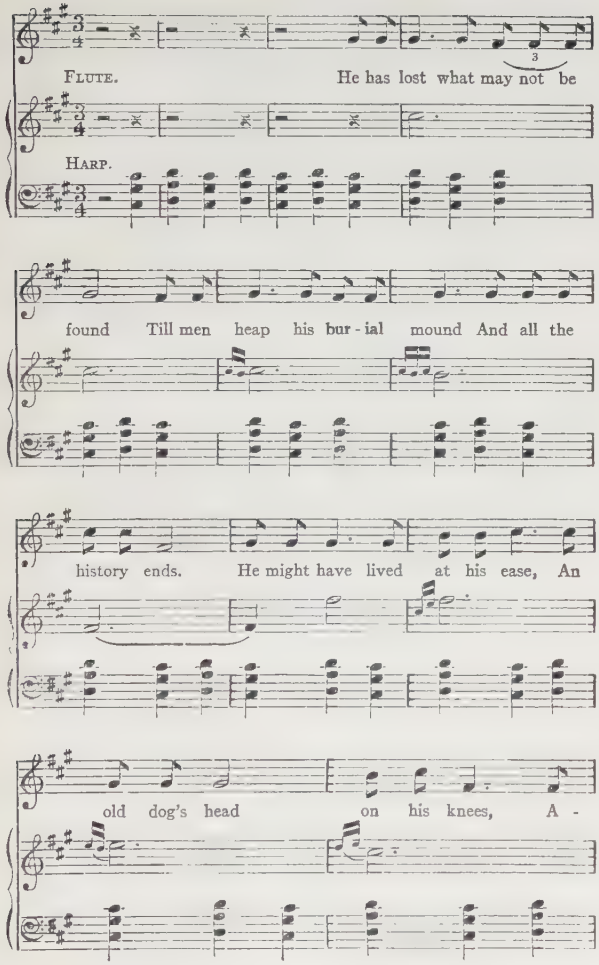
THE DANCE

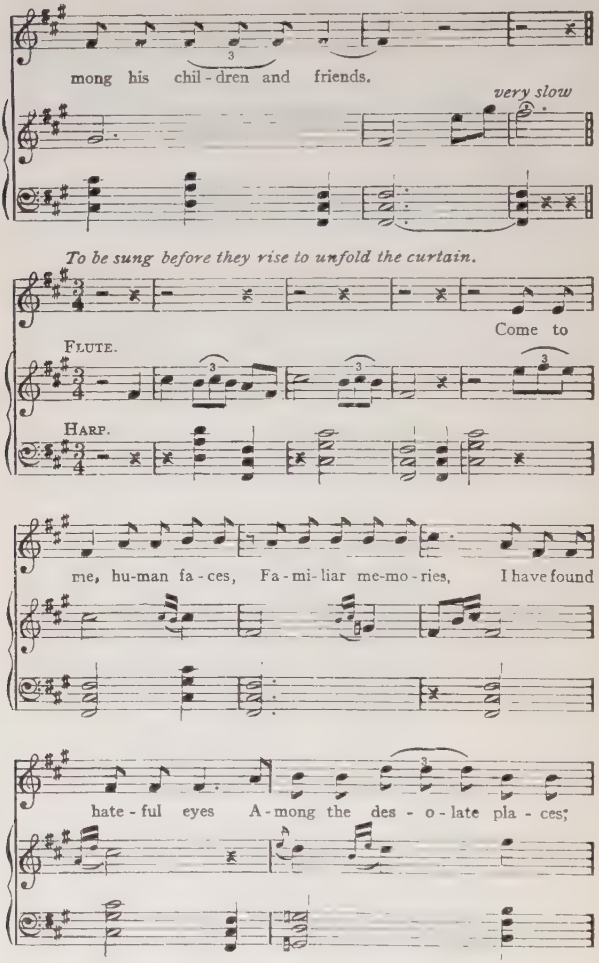
The Dance is played through to ⊕ A, begun again at ⊕ going to B, begun again at ⊕ and played to the end, omitting the passage from A to B. Thus it ought to last about 3½ minutes.

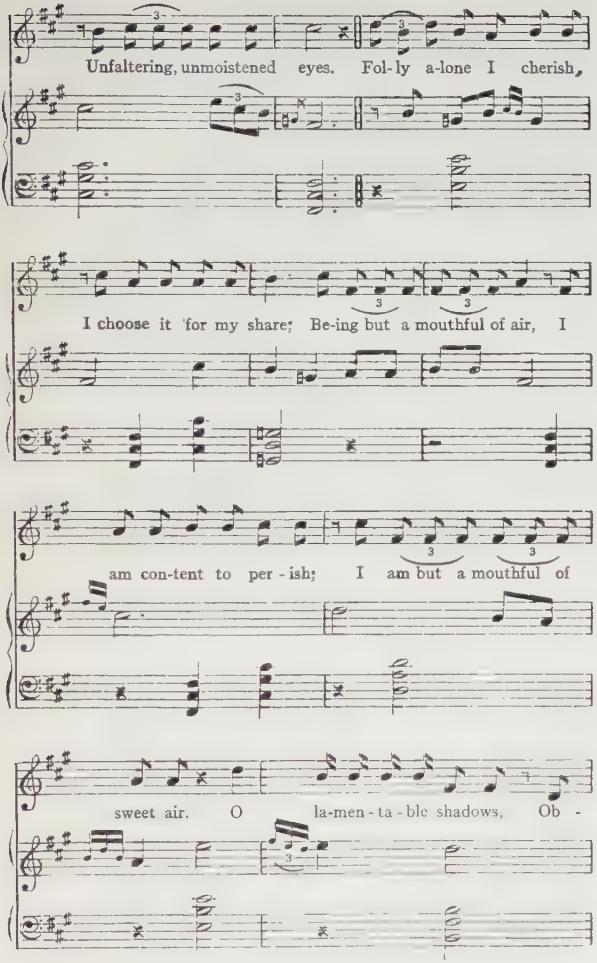
This Dance is joined on to the Prelude by a soft roll on the gong while the girl begins to move.


cres - cen - do.
f
diminuendo . . p
rr
Gong.
cres - cen - do. . . . . .
diminuendo.
f
rr

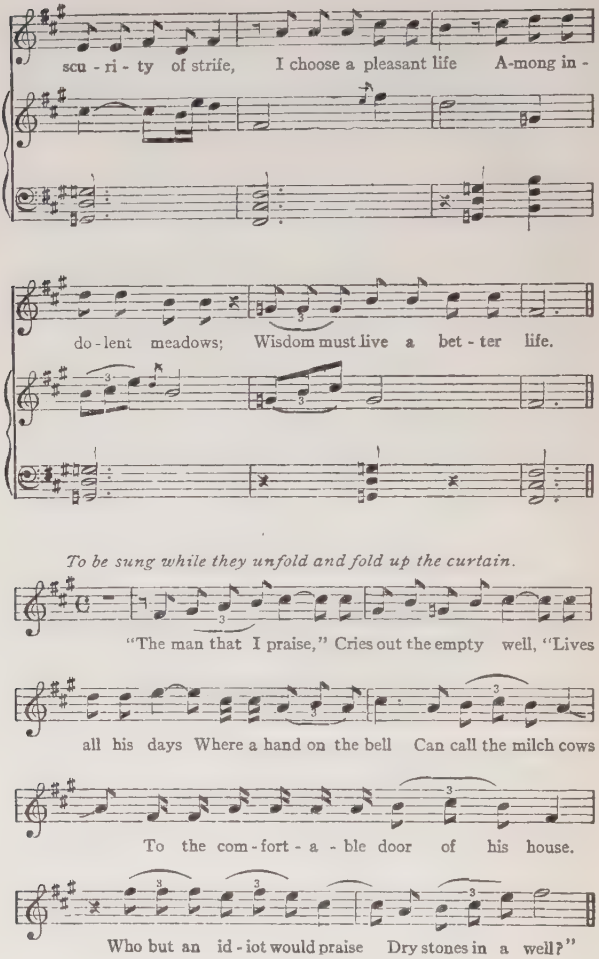

louder and
faster
Go back to sign ⊕ A
ff
rr
Gong.
Gong.
Speaking:
"O God, protect me," etc.
slower
rr
rr
rr
Drum. Gong. Drum. Gong. Drum.

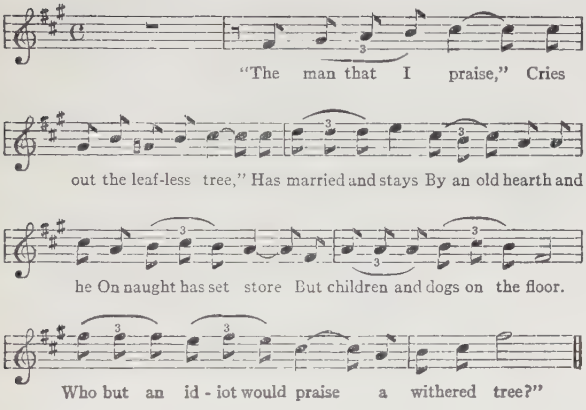

very slow
B
a little quicker
faster and faster to the end
Speaking:
"The madness has laid hold upon him."

abrupt
fff
dim.
Gong.
ff
cres - cen - do
Gong.
slower
Speaking:
" Run where you will . . "
very slow
fff
p
pp
fff
abrupt
pp
Drum.
Speaking:
" I have heard water splash,"
At the end of the Dance begins a soft roll on the gong
Harp.
8ve
pp
and so on till they sing, " He has lost what may not be found . . ;"


FLUTE.
He has lost what may not be
HARP.
found Till men heap his bur - ial mound And all the
history ends. He might have lived at his ease, An
old dog's head on his knees, A -


mong his chil - dren and friends.
very slow
To be sung before they rise to unfold the curtain.
Come to
FLUTE.
HARP.
me, hu-man fa-ces, Fa-mi-liar me-mo-ries, I have found
hate - ful eyes A - mong the des - o - late pla - ces;


Unfaltering, unmoistened eyes. Fol-ly a-lone I cherish,
I choose it for my share; Be-ing but a mouthful of air, I
am con-tent to per-ish; I am but a mouthful of
sweet air. O la-men-ta-ble shadows, Ob-


scu - ri - ty of strife, I choose a pleasant life A-mong in -
do - lent meadows; Wisdom must live a bet - ter life.
To be sung while they unfold and fold up the curtain.
"The man that I praise," Cries out the empty well, "Lives
all his days Where a hand on the bell Can call the milch cows
To the com - fort - a - ble door of his house.
Who but an id - iot would praise Dry stones in a well?"


"The man that I praise," Cries
out the leaf-less tree," Has married and stays By an old hearth and
he On naught has set store But children and dogs on the floor.
Who but an id - iot would praise a withered tree?"

NOTE ON
'THE ONLY JEALOUSY OF EMER'

WHILE writing these plays, intended for some fifty people in a drawing-room or a studio, I have so rejoiced in my freedom from the stupidity of an ordinary audience that I have filled *The Only Jealousy of Emer* with convictions about the nature and history of a woman's beauty, which Robartes found in the *Speculum* of Gyraldus and in Arabia Deserta among the Judwalis. The soul through each cycle of its development is held to incarnate through twenty-eight typical incarnations, corresponding to the phases of the moon, the light part of the moon's disc symbolising the subjective and the dark part the objective nature, the wholly dark moon (called Phase 1) and the wholly light (called Phase 15) symbolising complete objectivity and complete subjectivity respectively. In a poem called 'The Phases of the Moon' in *The Wild Swans at Coole* I have described certain aspects of this symbolism, which needs, however, 100 pages or more for its exposition, for it purports to be a complete classification and analysis of every possible type of human intellect, Phase 1 and Phase 15 symbolising, however, two incarnations not visible to human eyes nor having human characteristics. The invisible fifteenth incarnation is that of the greatest possible bodily beauty, and the fourteenth and sixteenth those of the greatest beauty visible to human eyes. Much that Robartes has found might be a commentary on Castiglione's saying that the physical

beauty of woman is the spoil or monument of the victory of the soul, for physical beauty, only possible to subjective natures, is described as the result of emotional toil in past lives. Objective natures are declared to be always ugly, hence the disagreeable appearance of politicians, reformers, philanthropists, and men of science. A saint or sage before his final deliverance has one incarnation as a woman of supreme beauty.

In writing these little plays I knew that I was creating something which could only fully succeed in a civilisation very unlike ours. I think they should be written for some country where all classes share in a half-mythological, half-philosophical folk-belief which the writer and his small audience lift into a new subtlety. All my life I have longed for such a country, and always found it quite impossible to write without having as much belief in its real existence as a child has in that of the wooden birds, beasts, and persons of his toy Noah's ark. I have now found all the mythology and philosophy I need.

MUSIC FOR 'THE DREAMING OF THE BONES'[1]

By WALTER MORSE RUMMEL

(1917)

Music of tone and music of speech are distinct from each other.

Here my sole object has been to find some tone formula which will enhance and bring out a music underlying the words. The process is therefore directly opposed to that of tone-music creation, which from the formless directly creates its tone form, whereas I seek to derive a formless overflow from the already formed.

FIRST MUSICIAN: *A medium voice,* more chanting than singing, not letting the musical value of the sound predominate too greatly the spoken value.

The First Musician uses a *Plucked Instrument* (harp or zither) to reinforce the notes of his song in unison or in the octave. (It is advisable not to reinforce *each* note sung, but only each *beat,* unless certain difficulties of pitch would necessitate the reinforcing of such note.)

During the symphonic moments of the play the Plucked Instrument assumes a more individual part.

SECOND MUSICIAN: Using a *Flute,* of a soft and discreet quality.

[1] All rights of performance reserved by W. M. Rummel.

THIRD MUSICIAN: Using a *Bowed Instrument,* one-stringed, more like a Hindu Sarinda, perhaps with a sympathetic vibrating string, giving a nasal sound. This part furnishes a bass, a sort of horizon to the song, and becomes more individual in the symphonic parts of the play.

FOURTH MUSICIAN: Using a *Drum,* preferably also an oriental model, played with the palm and the fingers of the hand. The drum part is indicated by — (long) and ◡ (short). The numbers below these indications signify the fingers employed. The using of the palm of the hand is indicated by P.

In case there are only *Three Musicians,* the Second and Third Musicians can alternatively take the Drum part in places where they are unoccupied.

All instrumental music, especially during the speaking parts, must always leave the voice in the foreground.

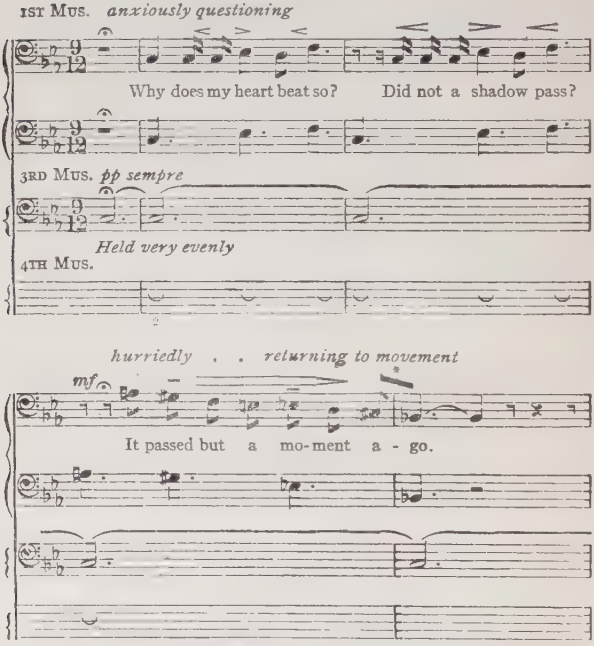
W. M. R.

THE DREAMING OF THE BONES

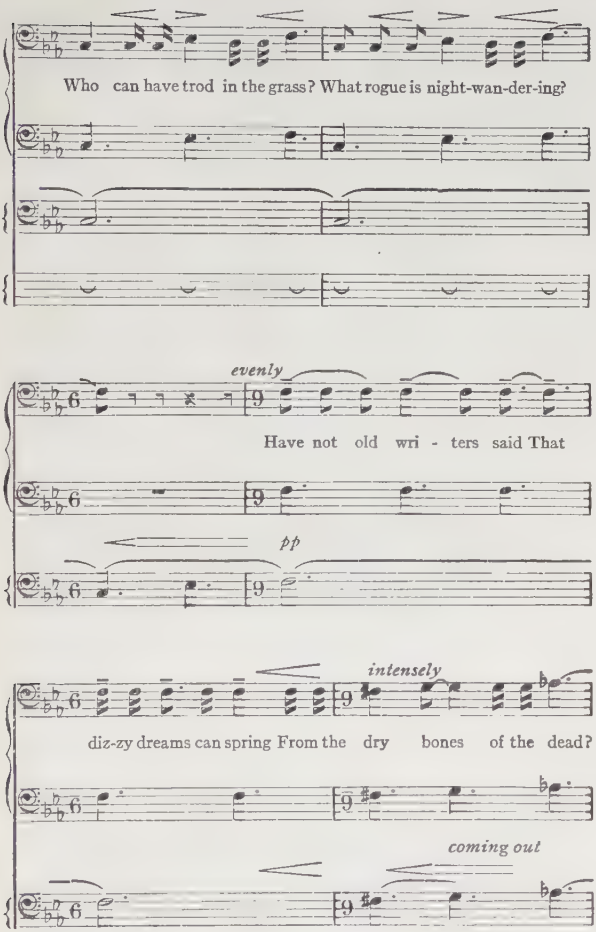
The stage is any bare place in a room with a wall beyond it. A screen or curtain hung with a pattern of mountain and sky can stand against it, but the pattern must only symbolize or suggest.

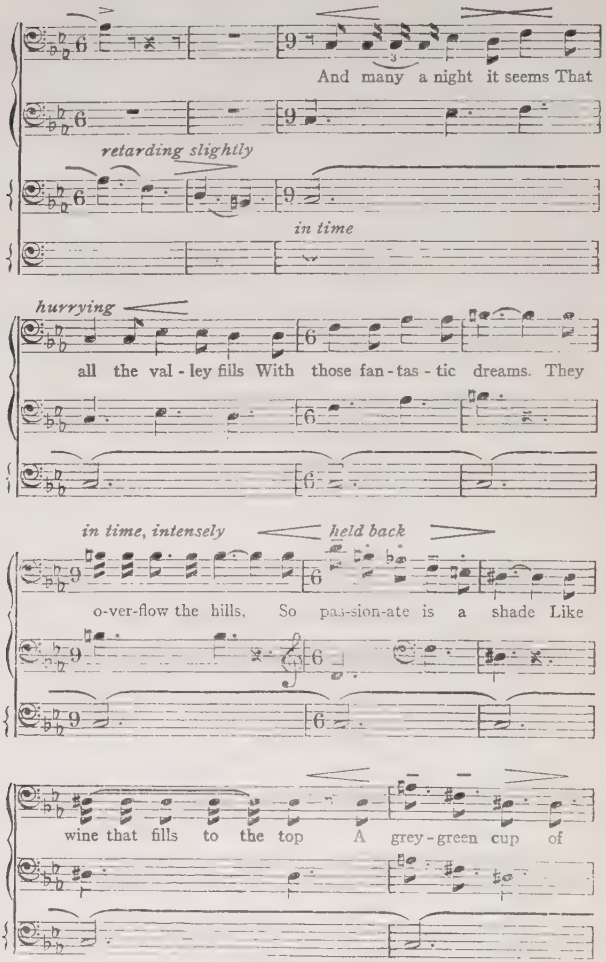
THREE (FOUR) MUSICIANS *enter. One stands singing while the others sit down against the wall by their instruments which are already there: a plucked instrument, a bowed instrument, and flute and drum.*

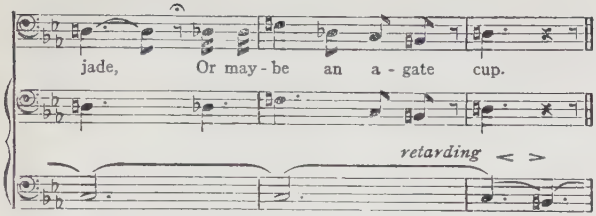
FIRST MUSICIAN (*singing*).


1ST MUS. anxiously questioning
Why does my heart beat so? Did not a shadow pass?
3RD MUS. pp sempre
Held very evenly
4TH MUS.
hurriedly . . returning to movement
mf
It passed but a mo-ment a - go.

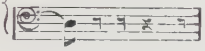
* Indicates a slide (portamento) of the voice, after oriental fashion – see subsequent applications.


Who can have trod in the grass? What rogue is night-wan-der-ing?
evenly
Have not old wri - ters said That
pp
intensely
diz-zy dreams can spring From the dry bones of the dead?
coming out

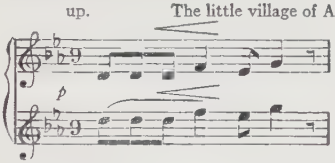

And many a night it seems That
retarding slightly
in time
hurrying
all the val - ley fills With those fan - tas - tic dreams. They
in time, intensely
held back
o-ver-flow the hills, So pas-sion-ate is a shade Like
wine that fills to the top A grey - green cup of



1ST MUS. (*speaking*) 3RD MUS. The hour before dawn and the moon covered

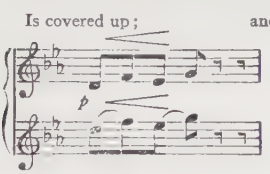


up. The little village of Abbey is covered up;

1ST MUS. 2ND MUS. (*Flute*)

1. The little narrow trodden way that runs
From the white road to the Abbey of Corcomroe

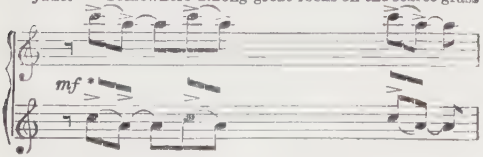
Is covered up; and all about the hills

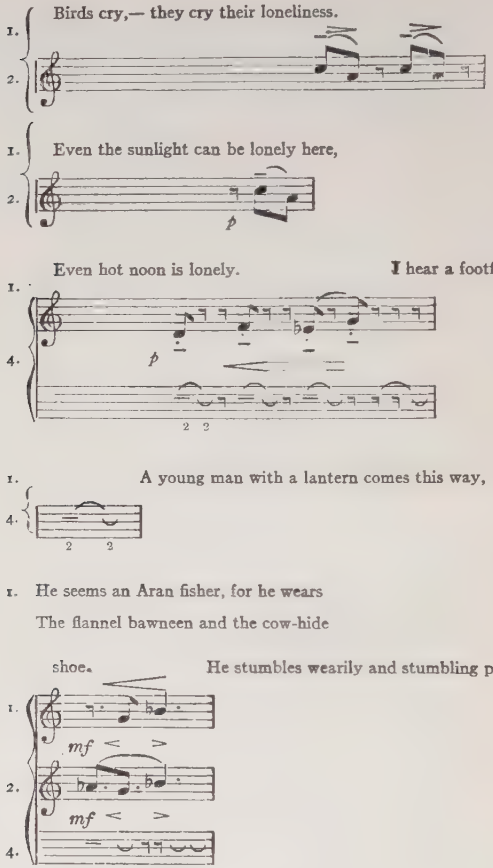
1. 2.



1. Are like a circle of Agate or of

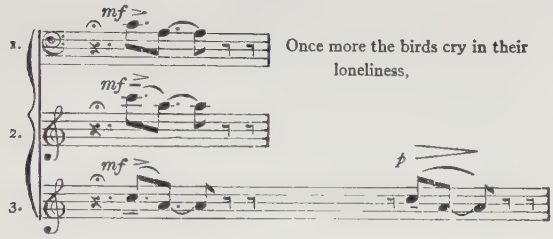
1. Jade. Somewhere among great rocks on the scarce grass

2. 3.

* See footnote, page 444



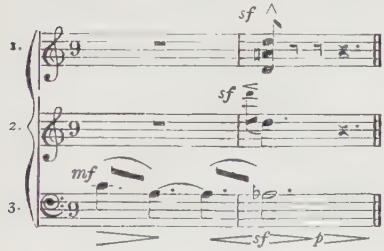
(*A Young Man enters praying in Irish*)

CHORUS

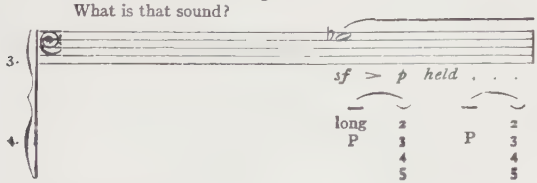


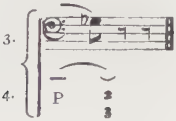
Once more the birds cry in their loneliness,

1. But now they wheel about our heads; and now
They have dropped on the grey stone to the north-east.

(*A Young Man and Young Girl come in*)

No music until page line

YOUNG MAN: For fear their owners might find shelter there
What is that sound?



STRANGER: An old horse . . .

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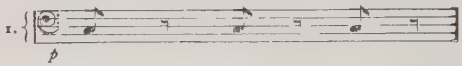
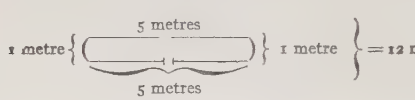
STRANGER: Or grey Aughtmana shake their wings and—



THE WALK AROUND THE STAGE

Two steps may be taken to each musical measure, making it a very slow figurative step. This will mean about 24 steps to one walk around the stage (Round). The last two steps may be twice as long (*in time*), accompanied by certain movements of expectancy. In calculating that each step amounts to half a metre, the length of the stage would have to be five metres.

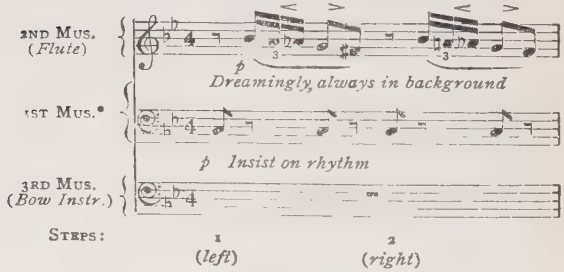


If neccessary the two opening measures may be repeated at will, the same at beginning of each round.

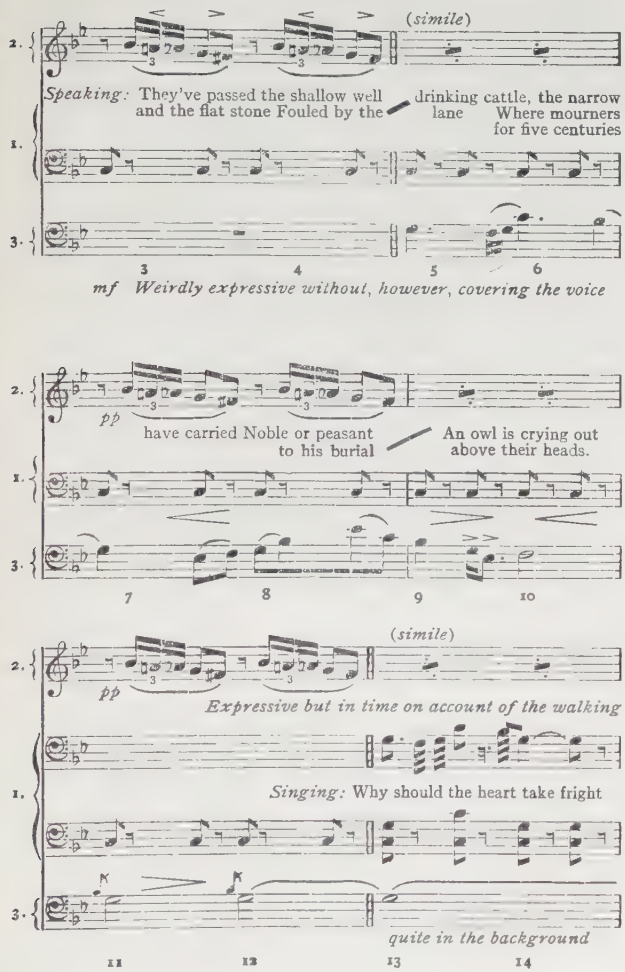
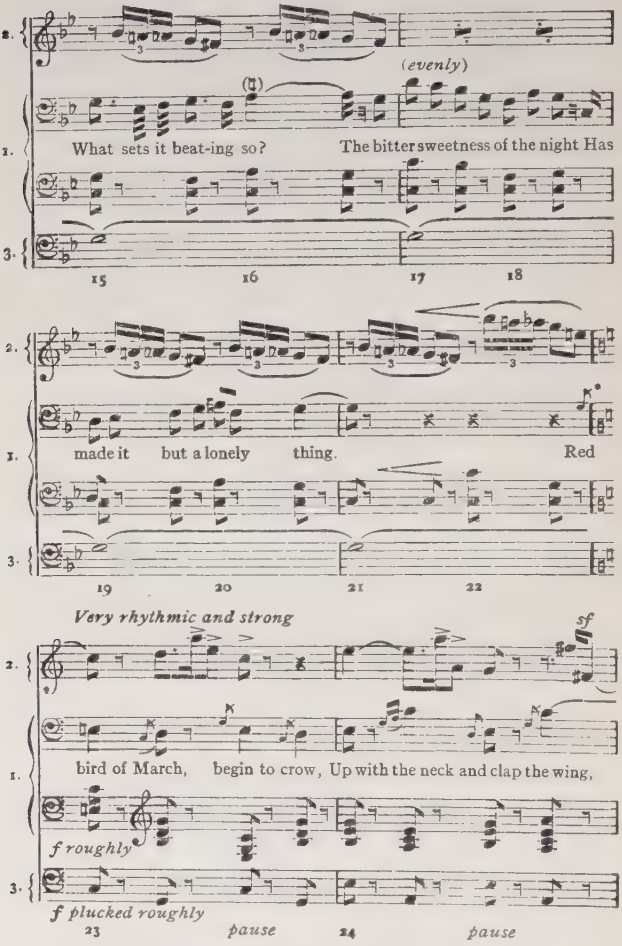
As to the spoken part preceding the song in each round, this must be arranged for by the singer. The singing voice must be able to easily enter in time at its proper place. The spoken part, however, can be begun before the time indicated for it in the music, or after, according to the speed of speech. The rhythm of the music should be *slow*.

STRANGER :— cry

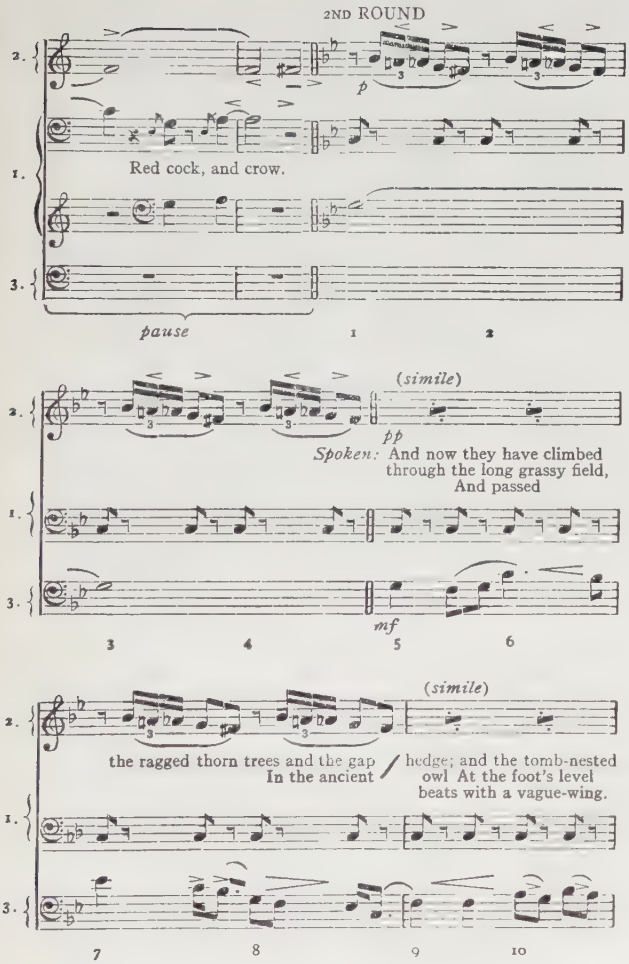
1ST ROUND. *In a slow mysterious rhythm*

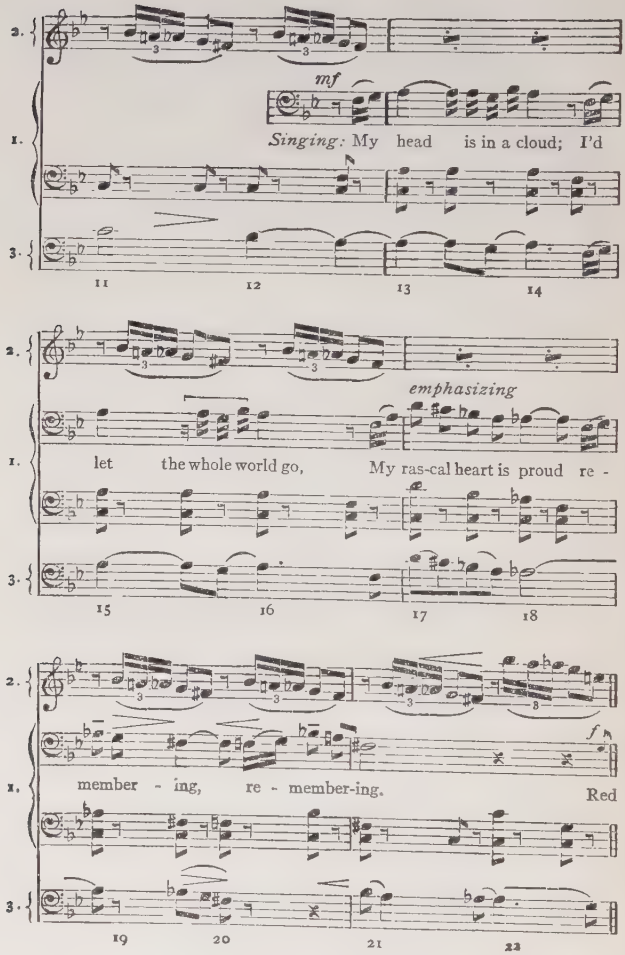
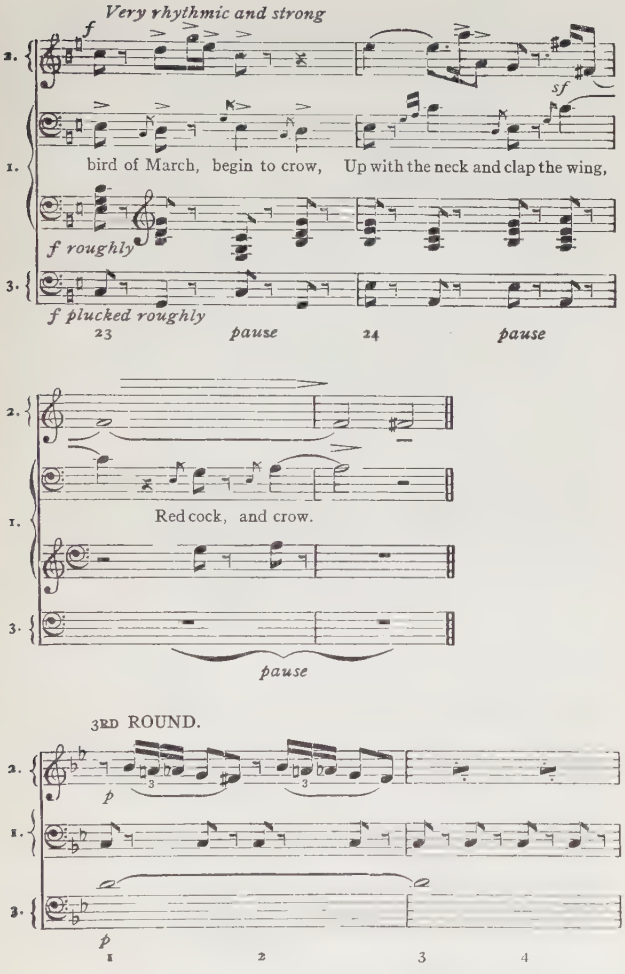


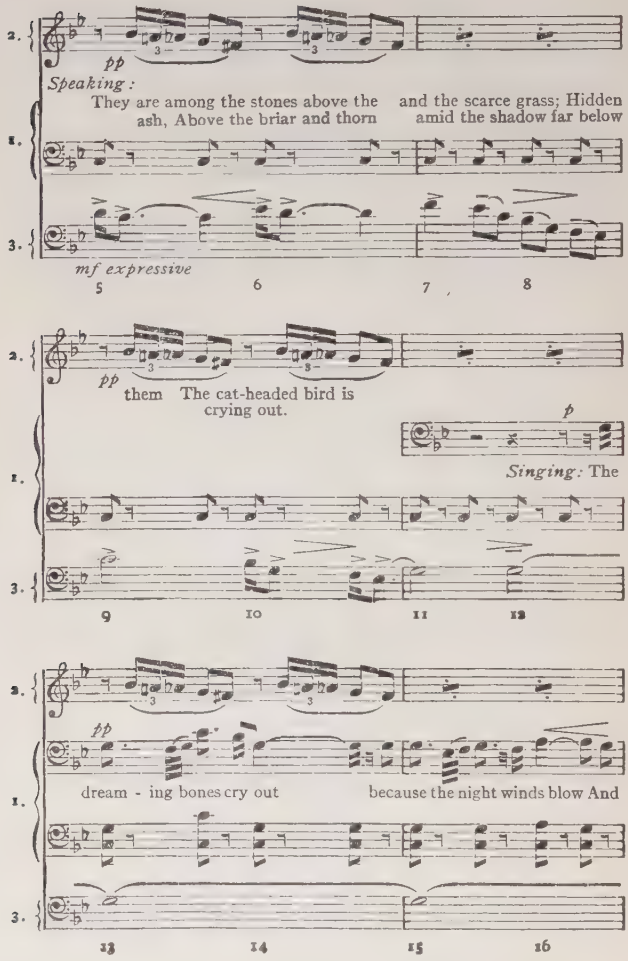
* The 4th Musician may double the plucked instrument, giving the same rhythm.

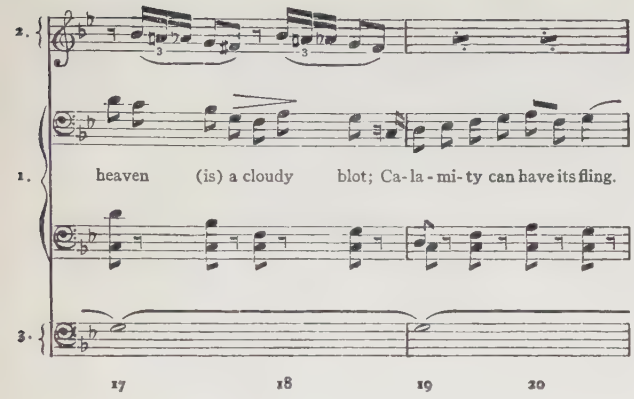
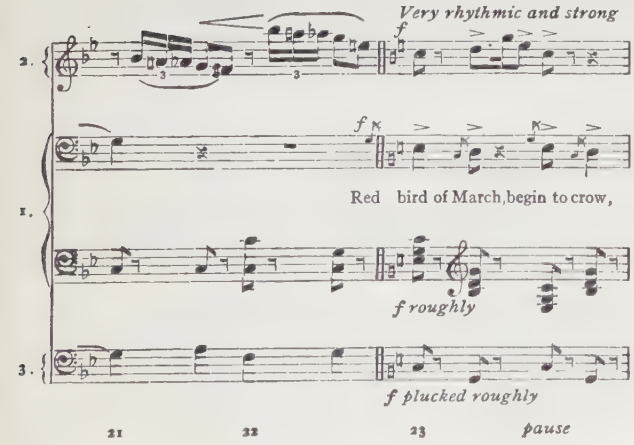

(simile)
Speaking: They've passed the shallow well and the flat stone Fouled by the drinking cattle, the narrow lane Where mourners for five centuries
mf Weirdly expressive without, however, covering the voice
pp have carried Noble or peasant to his burial An owl is crying out above their heads.
(simile)
pp Expressive but in time on account of the walking
Singing: Why should the heart take fright
quite in the background

(evenly)
What sets it beat-ing so? The bitter sweetness of the night Has
15 16 17 18
made it but a lonely thing. Red
19 20 21 22
Very rhythmic and strong
sf
bird of March, begin to crow, Up with the neck and clap the wing,
f roughly
f plucked roughly
23 pause 24 pause

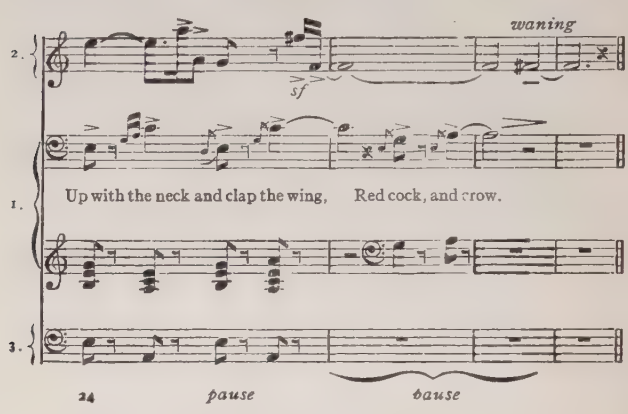
* All small notes sung as indicated, *before* the beat, but nevertheless very short


2ND ROUND
2.
1.
3.
p
Red cock, and crow.
pause
1
2
(simile)
pp
Spoken: And now they have climbed through the long grassy field, And passed
mf
3
4
5
6
(simile)
the ragged thorn trees and the gap In the ancient hedge; and the tomb-nested owl At the foot's level beats with a vague-wing.
7
8
9
10


2.
1.
3.
mf
Singing: My head is in a cloud; I'd
11 12 13 14
emphasizing
let the whole world go, My ras-cal heart is proud re -
15 16 17 18
f
member - ing, re - member-ing. Red
19 20 21 22

Very rhythmic and strong
f
sf
bird of March, begin to crow, Up with the neck and clap the wing,
f roughly
f plucked roughly
23
pause
24
pause
Red cock, and crow.
pause
3RD ROUND.
p
p
1
2
3
4


2.
pp
Speaking:
They are among the stones above the ash, Above the briar and thorn
and the scarce grass; Hidden amid the shadow far below
1.
3.
mf expressive
5
6
7
8
2.
pp
them The cat-headed bird is crying out.
p
1.
Singing: The
3.
9
10
11
12
2.
pp
1.
dream - ing bones cry out
because the night winds blow And
3.
13
14
15
16

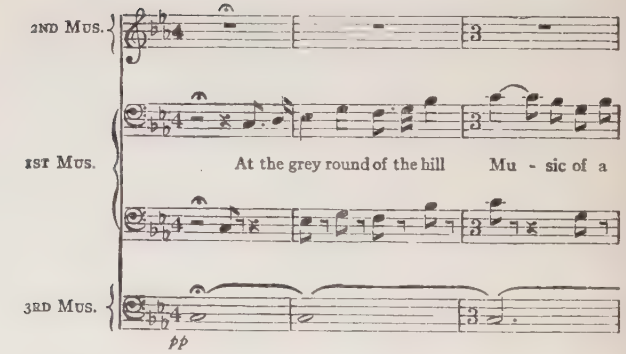

2.
1.
heaven (is) a cloudy blot; Ca-la-mi-ty can have its fling.
3.
17
18
19
20

Very rhythmic and strong
f
2.
f
Red bird of March, begin to crow,
1.
f roughly
3.
f plucked roughly
21
22
23
pause

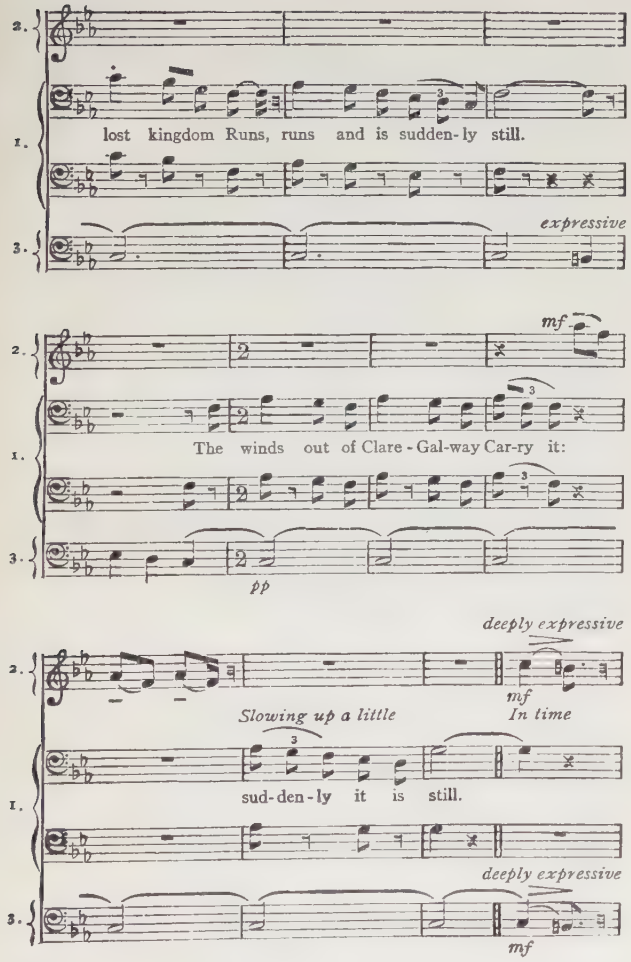


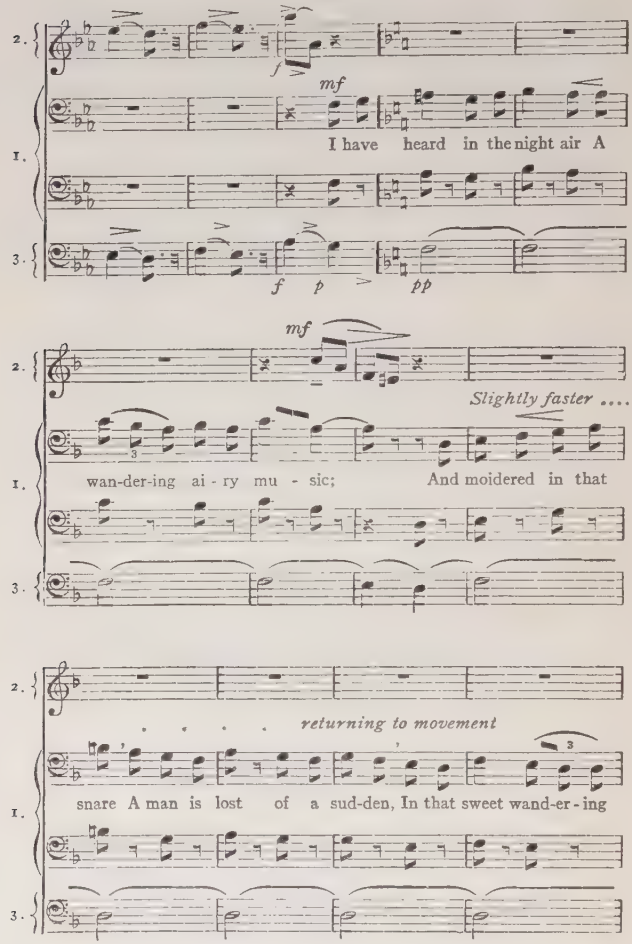
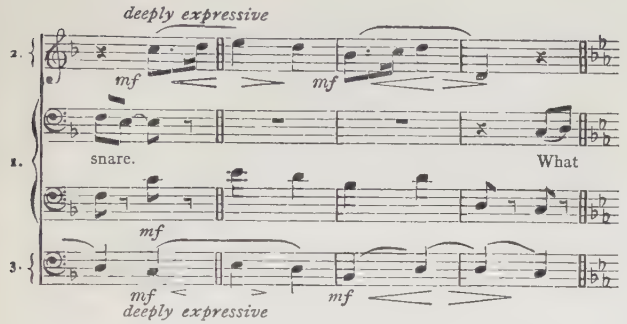
Speaking:—THE STRANGER: We're almost, etc. *No music*

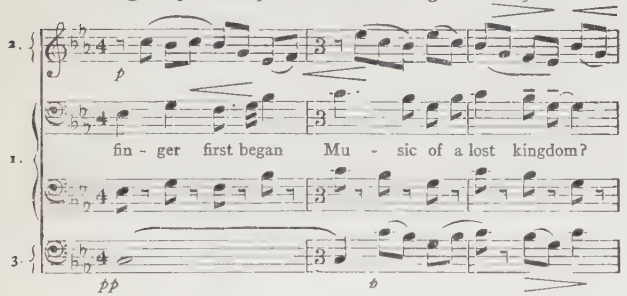
CLOSING SONG

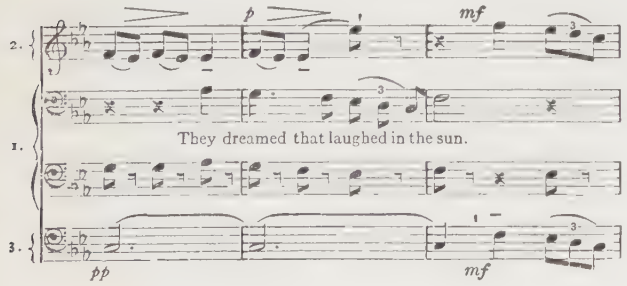
THE MUSICIAN *singing*

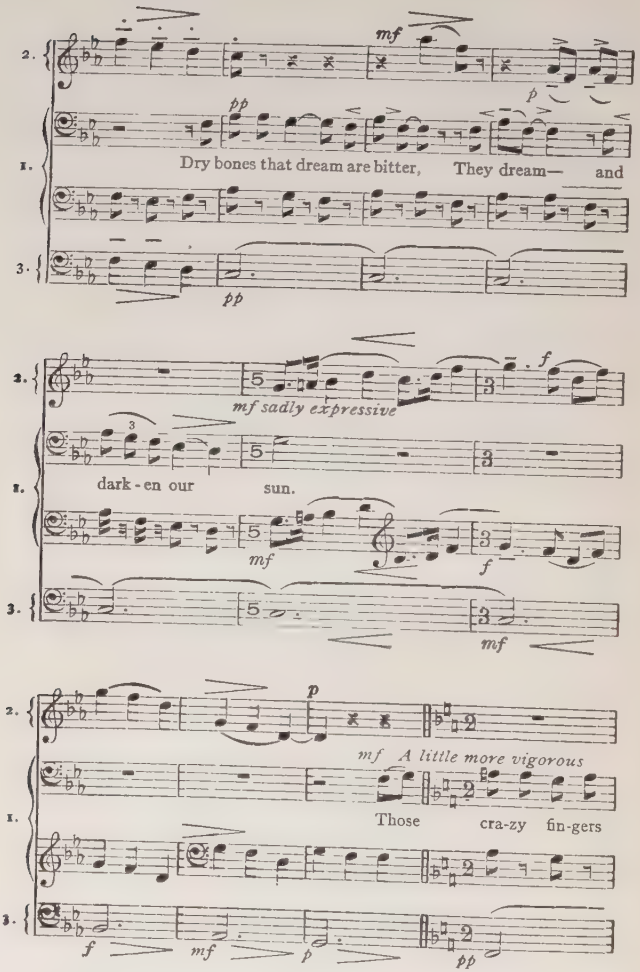


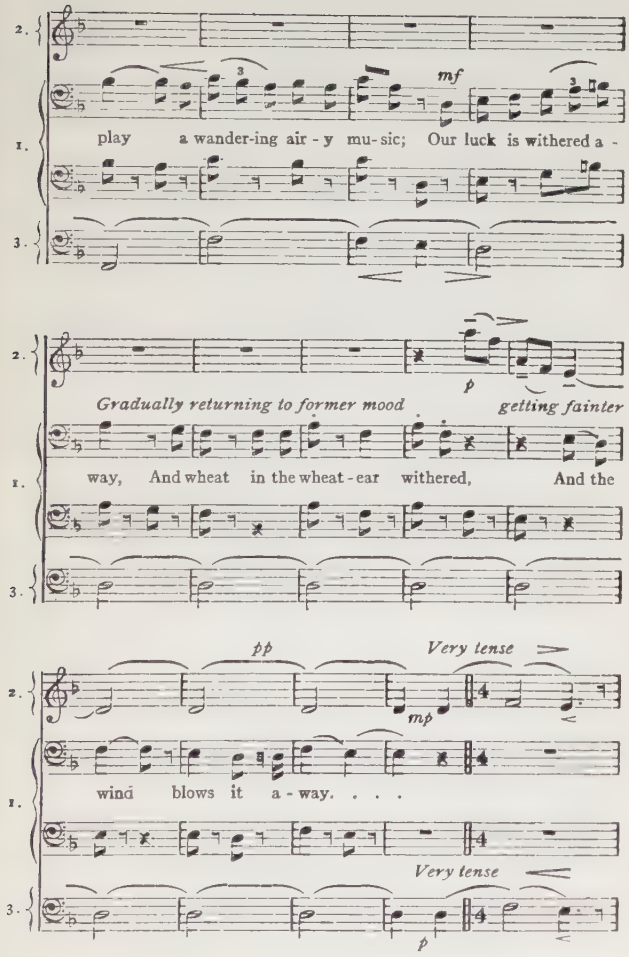

2.
1.
3.
lost kingdom Runs, runs and is sudden-ly still.
expressive
mf
The winds out of Clare-Gal-way Car-ry it:
pp
deeply expressive
mf
Slowing up a little
In time
sud-den-ly it is still.
deeply expressive
mf

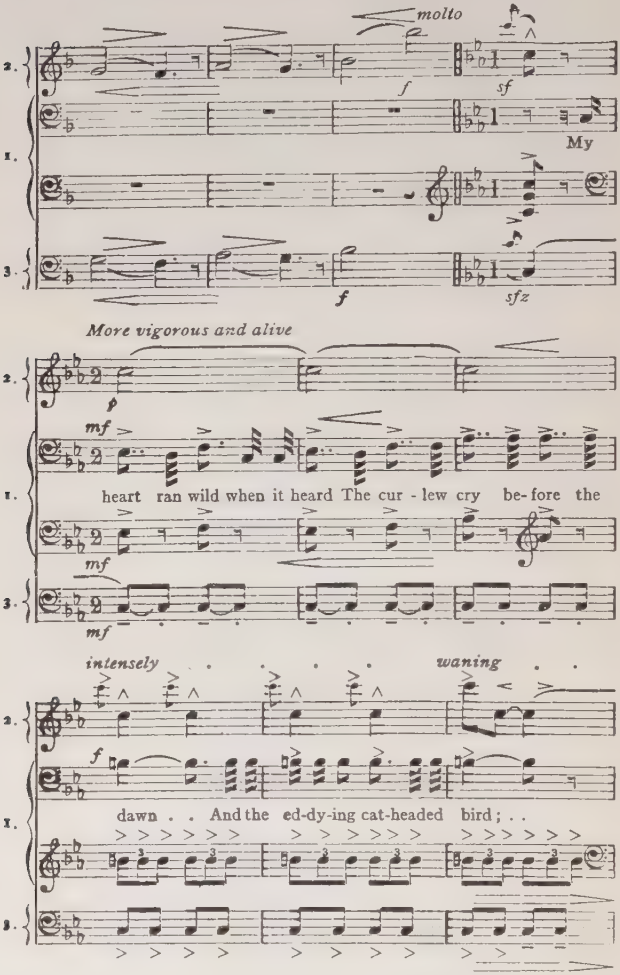

2.
1.
3.
f
mf
I have heard in the night air A
f p
pp
mf
Slightly faster ....
wan-der-ing ai - ry mu - sic; And moidered in that
returning to movement
snare A man is lost of a sud-den, In that sweet wand-er - ing

deeply expressive
mf
mf
snare.
What
mf
mf
mf
deeply expressive

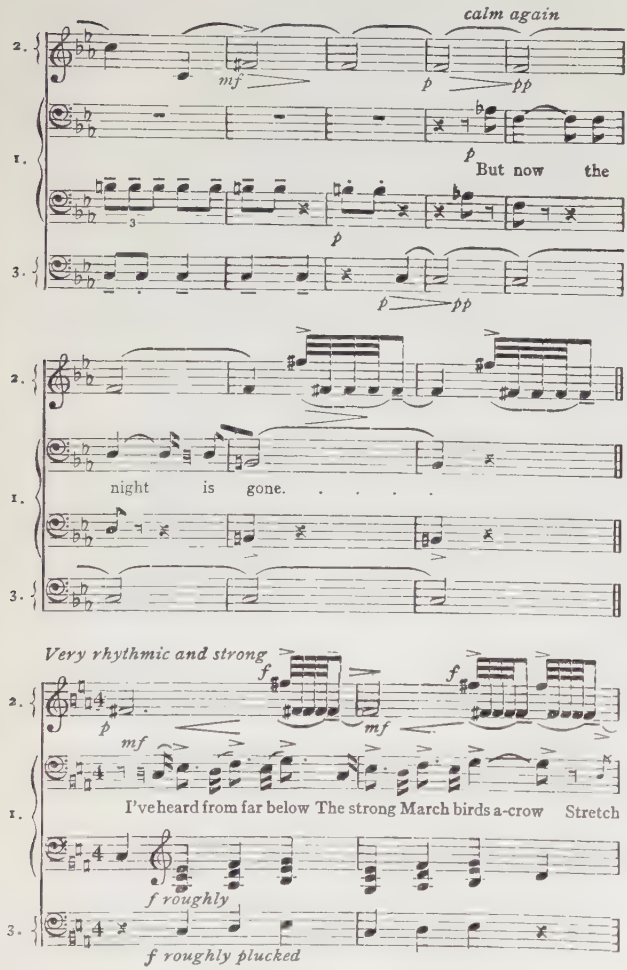

Coming out plaintively, without disturbing the melody
p
fin - ger first began Mu - sic of a lost kingdom?
pp

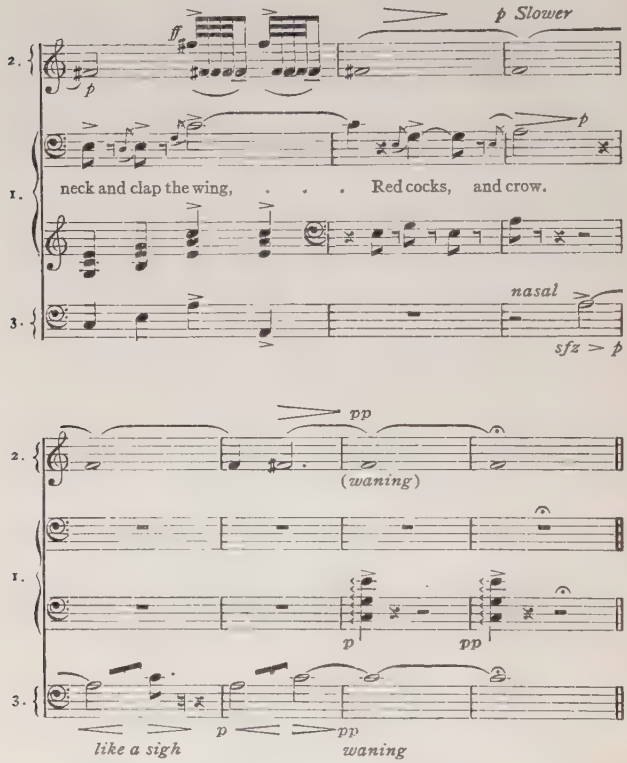

p
mf
They dreamed that laughed in the sun.
pp
mf


2.
1.
3.
mf
p
pp
Dry bones that dream are bitter, They dream— and
pp
mf sadly expressive
f
dark - en our sun.
mf
f
mf
p
mf A little more vigorous
Those cra-zy fin-gers
f
mf
p
pp


mf
play a wander-ing air - y mu-sic; Our luck is withered a -
p
Gradually returning to former mood
getting fainter
way, And wheat in the wheat-ear withered, And the
pp
Very tense
mp
wind blows it a - way. . . .
Very tense
p


molto
f
sf
My
f
sfz
Move vigorous and alive
p
mf
heart ran wild when it heard The cur - lew cry be-fore the
mf
mf
intensely
waning
f
dawn . . And the ed-dy-ing cat-headed bird; . .


calm again
mf
p
pp
But now the
night is gone. . . . .
Very rhythmic and strong
I've heard from far below The strong March birds a-crow Stretch
f roughly
f roughly plucked



PARIS, *September* 1917.

NOTE ON
'THE DREAMING OF THE BONES'

DERVORGILLA's few lines can be given, if need be, to Dermot, and Dervorgilla's part taken by a dancer who has the training of a dancer alone; nor need that masked dancer be a woman.

The conception of the play is derived from the world-wide belief that the dead dream back, for a certain time, through the more personal thoughts and deeds of life. The wicked, according to Cornelius Agrippa, dream themselves to be consumed by flames and persecuted by demons; and there is precisely the same thought in a Japanese 'Noh' play, where a spirit, advised by a Buddhist priest she has met upon the road, seeks to escape from the flames by ceasing to believe in the dream. The lovers in my play have lost themselves in a different but still self-created winding of the labyrinth of conscience. The Judwalis distinguish between the Shade which dreams back through events in the order of their intensity, becoming happier as the more painful and, therefore, more intense wear themselves away, and the Spiritual Being, which lives back through events in the order of their occurrence, this living back being an exploration of their moral and intellectual origin.

All solar natures, to use the Arabian terms, during life move towards a more objective form of experience, the lunar towards a more subjective. After death a lunar man, reversing the intellectual order, grows always closer to objective experience, which in the spir-

itual world is wisdom, while a solar man mounts gradually to the most extreme subjective experience possible to him. In the spiritual world subjectivity is innocence, and innocence, in life an accident of nature, is now the highest achievement of the intellect. I have already put the thought in verse.

> He grows younger every second
> That were all his birthdays reckoned
> Much too solemn seemed;
> Because of what he had dreamed,
> Or the ambitions that he served,
> Much too solemn and reserved.
> Jaunting, journeying
> To his own dayspring,
> He unpacks the loaded pern
> Of all 'twas pain or joy to learn,
> Of all that he had made.
> The outrageous war shall fade;
> At some old winding whitethorn root
> He'll practise on the shepherd's flute,
> Or on the close-cropped grass
> Court his shepherd lass,
> Or run where lads reform our daytime
> Till that is their long shouting playtime;
> Knowledge he shall unwind
> Through victories of the mind,
> Till, clambering at the cradle side,
> He dreams himself his mother's pride,
> All knowledge lost in trance
> Of sweeter ignorance.

The Shade is said to fade out at last, but the Spiritual Being does not fade, passing on to other states of existence after it has attained a spiritual state, of which the surroundings and aptitudes of early life are a correspondence. When, as in my poem, I speak of events while describing the ascent of the Spiritual Being, I but use them as correspondence or symbol. Michael Robartes writes to Aherne, under the date of May 1917, a curious letter on this subject: 'There is an analogy between the dreaming

back of the Body of Passion' (I have used instead of this term the more usual term Shade), 'and our ordinary dreams—and between the life of Spirit and Celestial Body taken together' (I have substituted for both terms the less technical, though, I fear, vague term Spiritual Being), 'and those coherent thoughts of dreamless sleep, which, as I know on my personal knowledge, coincide with dreams. These dreams are at one time their symbols, and at another live with an independent life. I have several times been present while my friend, an Arab doctor in Bagdad, carried on long conversations with a sleeping man, and I have myself joined in those conversations. I do not say a hypnotised man, or even a somnambulist, for the sleep seemed natural sleep produced by fatigue, though sometimes with a curious suddenness. The sleeper would discuss the most profound truths and yet while doing so make, now and again, some movement that suggested dreaming, although the part that spoke remained entirely unconscious of the dream. On waking he would often describe a long dream, sometimes a symbolic reflection of the conversation, but more often produced by some external stimulus—a fall in temperature in the rooms, or some condition of body perhaps. Now and again these dreams would interrupt the conversation, as when he dreamed he had feathers in his mouth and began to blow. Seeing, therefore, that I have observed a separation between two parts of the nature during life, I find no difficulty in believing in a more complete separation, affirmed by my teachers, and supported by so much tradition, when the body is no longer there to hold the two parts together.'

I wrote my play before the Robartes papers came into my hands, even before I myself had received much of their thought from a different source, and in making the penance of Dermot and Dervorgilla last

so many centuries I have done something for which I had no warrant in these papers or from that source, but warrant there certainly is in the folklore of all countries. At certain moments the Spiritual Being, or rather that part of it which Robartes calls 'the Spirit,' is said to enter into the Shade, and during those moments it can converse with living men, though but within the narrow limits of its dream.

NOTE ON 'CALVARY'

I HAVE written the little songs of the chorus to please myself, confident that singer and composer, when the time came for performance, would certainly make it impossible for the audience to know what the words were. I used to think that singers should sing a recipe for a good dish, or a list of local trains, or something else they want to get by heart, but I have changed my mind and now I prefer to give him some mystery or secret. A reader can always solve the mystery and learn the secret by turning to a note, which need not be as long as those Dante put to several of the odes in the *Convito*. I use birds as symbols of subjective life, and my reason for this, and for certain other things, cannot be explained fully till I have published some part at any rate of those papers of Michael Robartes, over which I have now spent several years. The following passage in a letter written by Robartes to Aherne in the spring of 1917 must suffice. 'At present I rather pride myself on believing all the superstitions of the Judwalis, or rather in believing that there is not one amongst them that may not be true, but at first my West European mind rebelled. Once in the early morning, when I was living in a horse-hair tent among other similar tents, a young Arab woke me and told me to come with him if I would see a great wonder. He brought me to a level place in the sand, just outside the tent of a certain Arab, who had arrived the night before and had, as I knew, a reputation as a wonder-worker, and showed me certain marks on the sand. I said they were the

marks of a jackal, but he would not have this. When he had passed by a little after sunrise there was not a mark, and a few minutes later the marks were there. No beast could have come and gone unseen. When I asked his explanation he said they were made by the wonder-worker's "Daimon" or "Angel." "What," I said, "has it a beast's form?" "He goes much about the world," he said; "he has been in Persia and in Afghanistan, and as far west as Tripoli. He is interested in things, in places, he likes to be with many people, and that is why his Daimon has the form of a beast, but your Daimon would have a bird's shape because you are a solitary man." Later on, when I mastered their philosophy, I came to learn that the boy had but classified the wonder-worker and myself according to their division of all mankind into those who are dominated by objects and those who are dominated by the self or *Zat,* or, as we would say, into objective and subjective natures. Certain birds, especially as I see things, such lonely birds as the heron, hawk, eagle, and swan, are the natural symbols of subjectivity, especially when floating upon the wind alone or alighting upon some pool or river, while the beasts that run upon the ground, especially those that run in packs, are the natural symbols of objective man. Objective men, however personally alone, are never alone in their thought, which is always developed in agreement or in conflict with the thought of others and always seeks the welfare of some cause or institution, while subjective men are the more lonely the more they are true to type, seeking always that which is unique or personal.'

I have used my bird-symbolism in these songs to increase the objective loneliness of Christ by contrasting it with a loneliness, opposite in kind, that unlike His can be, whether joyous or sorrowful, sufficient to itself. I have surrounded Him with the images of

those He cannot save, not only with the birds, who have served neither God nor Cæsar, and await for none or for a different saviour, but with Lazarus and Judas and the Roman soldiers for whom He has died in vain. 'Christ,' writes Robartes, 'only pitied those whose suffering is rooted in death, in poverty, or in sickness, or in sin, in some shape of the common lot, and He came especially to the poor who are most subject to exterior vicissitude.' I have therefore represented in Lazarus and Judas types of that intellectual despair that lay beyond His sympathy, while in the Roman soldiers I suggest a form of objectivity that lay beyond His help. Robartes said in one of the conversations recorded by Aherne: 'I heard much of *Three Songs of Joy,* written by a certain old Arab, which owing to the circumstances of their origin were considered as proofs of great sanctity. He held the faith of Kusta ben Luki, but did not live with any of the two or three wandering companies of Judwalis. He lived in the town of Hâyel as servant to a rich Arab merchant. He himself had been a rich merchant of Aneyza and had been several times to India. On his return from one of these journeys he had found his house in possession of an enemy and was himself driven from Aneyza by the Wahâbies on some charge, I think of impiety, and it was then he made his first song of joy. A few years later his wife and child were murdered by robbers in the desert, and after certain weeks, during which it was thought that he must die of grief, his face cleared and his step grew firm and he made his second song. He gave away all his goods and became a servant in Hâyel, and a year or two later, believing that his death was near, he made his third song of joy. He lived, however, for several months, and when I met him had the use of all his faculties. I asked him about the "Three Songs," for I knew that even on his deathbed, as

became the votary of a small, contentious sect, he would delight in exposition. I said (though I knew from his songs themselves, that this was not his thought, but I wanted his explanation in his own words): "You have rejoiced that the Will of God should be done even though you and yours must suffer." He answered with some emotion: "Oh, no, Kusta ben Luki has taught us to divide all things into Chance and Choice; one can think about the world and about man, or anything else until all has vanished but these two things, for they are indeed the first cause of the animate and inanimate world. They exist in God, for if they did not He would not have freedom, He would be bound by His own Choice. In God alone, indeed, can they be united, yet each be perfect and without limit or hindrance. If I should throw from the dice-box there would be but six possible sides on each of the dice, but when God throws He uses dice that have all numbers and sides. Some worship His Choice; that is easy; to know that He has willed for some unknown purpose all that happens is pleasant; but I have spent my life in worshipping His Chance, and that moment when I understand the immensity of His Chance is the moment when I am nearest Him. Because it is very difficult and because I have put my understanding into three songs I am famous among my people."'

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